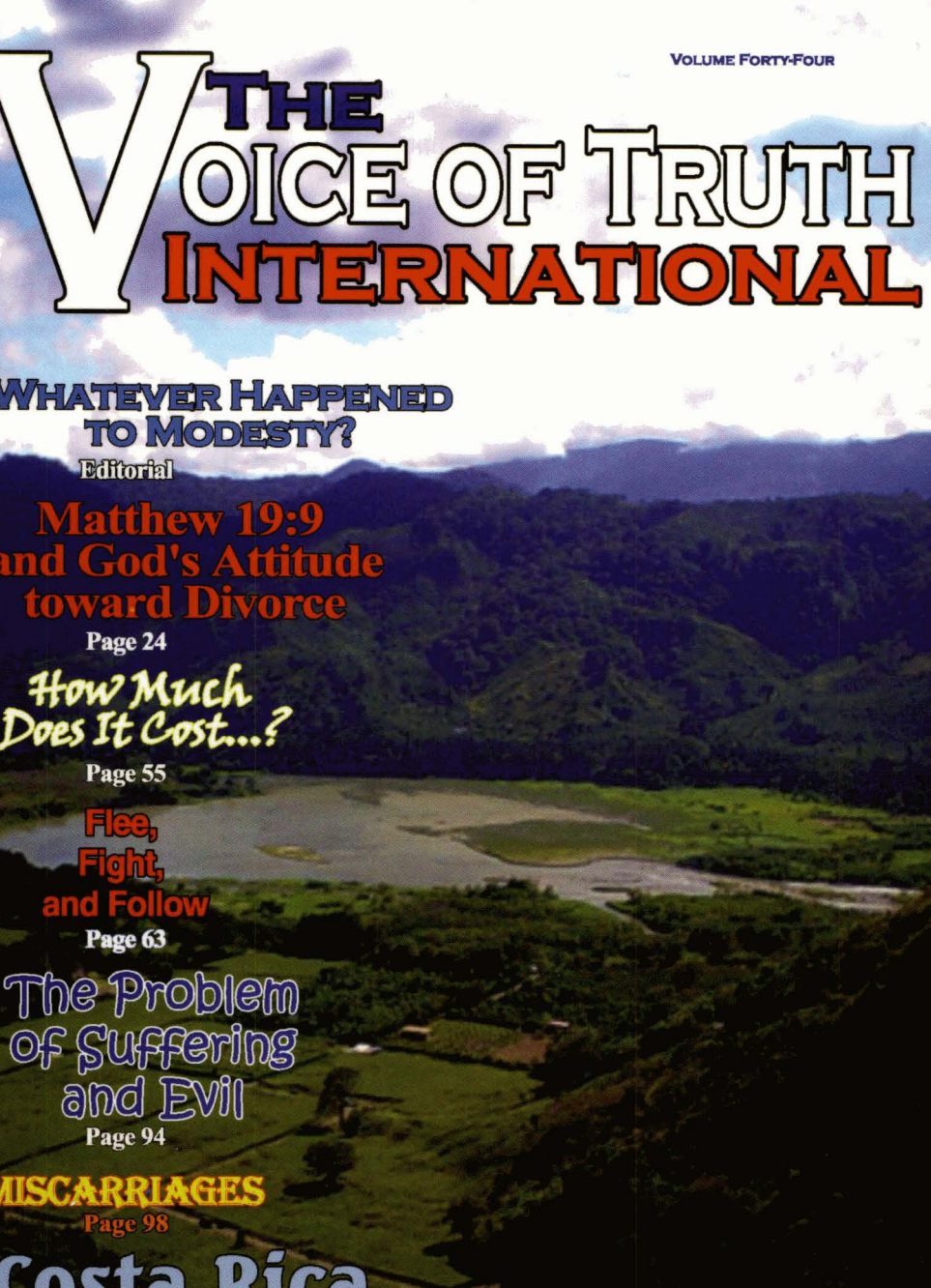
VOLUME FORTY-FOUR

THE VOICE OF TRUTH INTERNATIONAL



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO MODESTY?

Editorial

Matthew 19:9 and God's Attitude toward Divorce

Page 24

How Much Does It Cost...?

Page 55

Flee, Fight, and Follow

Page 63

The Problem of Suffering and Evil

Page 94

MISCARRIAGES

Page 98

Costa Rica

THE FINAL HOME

How great and glorious it will be
To cross that river dark and deep;
To reach at last the gilded shore
And dwell with God forevermore.

To walk on streets out-shining gold
And live with saints from days of old;
To talk with Peter, Paul, and John
While ages roll forever on.

To eat the fruit, the Tree of Life,
While every tear is gently dried,
To sit beside that river there
And never know another care;

To join in rapture with the throng
And praise the Lord in word and song;
To walk with Him who died for me
And live with God eternally . . .

How many blessings are in store
For those who pass that narrow door,
And on this earth walk paths so strait
Until they enter Heaven's gate,
— A place, a land forever fair —
How sweet `twill be to worship there;
How bright a hope each Christian owns,
To call God's land his final home.

— J.C. Choate

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THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST SALUTE YOU
(ROMANS 16:16).



....you are part of the great crowd gathered on the day of Pentecost, listening to Peter and the Apostles preaching the Gospel for the first time...

....you are convinced that you are a sinner, that your soul is lost....

....in your conviction and lostness, you cry out with others in the crowd,

"Men and brethren, what must we do?"

You wait for the answer:

"Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Then you, along with others, *"...gladly received his word and were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them."*

(Acts 2:36-41)

"...And
the Lord
added
to ***the church***
daily
those who
were being
saved"
(Acts 2:47)



WHATEVER HAPPENED TO MODESTY?

J. C. Choate
Editor-in-Chief

Each summer numerous articles are written by preachers and printed in local bulletins concerning the wearing of modest apparel. Mention is made of skimpy bathing suits worn at swimming pools and on public beaches, of shorts, mini-skirts, dresses with 'spagetti' straps, halters, see-through blouses, and other forms of undress.

In recent times, many young women all over the world have adopted the new style of very short, low-cut tops, with pants that are also scandulously low-cut, leaving much of the middle portion of their bodies bare. Jeans look tighter than skin, and mini-skirts are not only cut low but cut short as well.

Not only do girls and women wear such apparel — or lack of it — in recreational settings, in the work place and other public places, but some are so brazen as to wear such indecent garb to worship assemblies! This should be as embarrassing to them as it is to fellow members, both men and women.

You would think that most of these ladies — especially the older ones, and those who have been attending the assemblies since they were young — would know the Scripture well enough to realize that this kind of dress is totally out of place for the Christian in any public setting, whether on the street or in worship. Christians, of all people, should be setting an example of Christ-like behavior in the way they dress and conduct themselves.

If one is ignorant of the definition of 'modest' apparel, he/she needs to read the Scripture:

1 Timothy 2:9: *"...in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in **modest apparel,** with **propriety** and **moderation,** not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works."*

1 Peter 3:3-5: *"Do not let your adornment be merely outward — arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel — rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves..."*

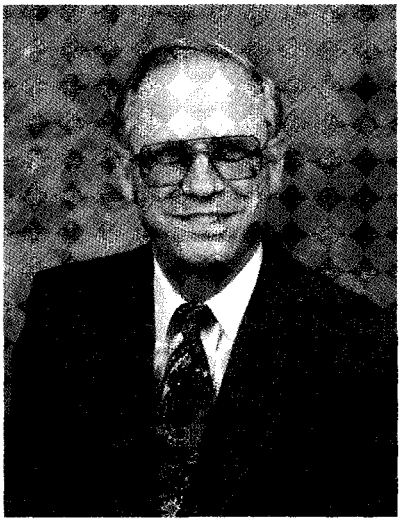
James 1:14: *"But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death."*

The Aposte Paul said that the older women should *"teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed"* (Titus 2:4,5).

Sadly, while ignoring what the scriptures say, and the articles brethren put in their bulletins concerning modest dress, even some Christian women are not ashamed to parade themselves indecently in public and in the worship assemblies. So what can be done to correct such a practice? In the first place, concerned mothers should dress modestly themselves, and then mothers and fathers should see to it that their children dress modestly at home, when they are out in public places, and at worship. If girls and women do come to worship in clothes that are immodest, the older ladies should take them aside and talk to them in a loving way about how they should dress so as not to bring shame on the name of Christ.

If these measures do not correct the problem, the elders should go before the congregation and teach on the subject of modest dress and the problems and sins that result from immodesty. They should ask that the members of the congregation be conscientious about how they present themselves to the world, striving to be Christ-like in their behavior and dress. If members should choose to ignore this admonition, the elders should call them aside, one by one, and talk to them about the bad example they are setting and urge them to begin from that day to dress in keeping with the teaching of the Bible. If they refuse to do so, the lesson and appeal should be made to them again. If that fails then the matter should be taken before the congregation. Hopefully these steps will correct the problem, but if the individual or individuals refuse to repent and ask for forgiveness, they should be withdrawn from. It is wrong for elders and leaders to ignore violations of Scripture that will result in these and others of the congregation being lost.

Will brethren act on these problems or will they ignore them, to the hurt of the church and even our country, as the influence of righteousness continues to wane? ✞



TO JUDGE, OR NOT TO JUDGE

Byron Nichols

The words of Jesus in Matthew 7:1 are often quoted fervently today. They read, *"Judge not, that you be not judged."* If there are any words from Scripture that would qualify as "politically correct" today, then surely these are those words. This is an age in which it is advocated that men are to "live and let live", opting to ignore, excuse, or condone any and all behavior, regardless of its violation of God's law.

The following observations are not offered in an attempt to justify any kind of judging by anyone that is in opposition to what the Bible teaches. This is not an effort to endorse unjust criticism or engage in condemnation, but it is an exercise in studying the biblical concept of judging on the part of Christians.

Many assert that Jesus is prohibiting the judging involved in calling attention to the sins of others, yet these same people are condemning what they see in others. In other words, they feel totally qualified and justified in judging those whom they believe to be guilty of judging others. One is made to wonder how and why judging is considered by these people to be admirable when they do the judging, while at the same time they declare with vehemence that the same judging is wrong for others. How can it be right for them if it is wrong for all others? I believe that the answer is that it cannot be right, and the basis for that response is found in the inspired words of Paul in Romans 2:1, where he says, *"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; **for you who judge do the same things**"* (emphasis added).

As is typically the case in Bible study, it is important to consider the

context of this declaration from Jesus, *"Judge not, that you be not judged."* Reading Matthew 7:2-5 sheds some very important light on His words in verse 1. In those following verses the Lord made it clear that His grave concern was not about the action of judging itself, but about the fallacy of a judgment being done by one who is hypocritically judging, trying to divert attention from his own sins by turning the spotlight on the sins of another.

In verse 1 Jesus has just said that it is wrong to judge others, yet in verse 6 He calls for action on the part of His followers which **requires** judging! Here He says, *"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."* The Lord here creates some questions for us: (1) Just what is "holy"? (2) Who are the "dogs"? (3) What are the "pearls"? (4) Who are the "swine"? In order for us to comply with the Lord's commands in this verse, we must have clarification of these terms which He used in an obviously symbolic way. For us to answer these four questions by identifying to whom or what Jesus was referring, we have no choice but to engage in judging. To do less would be to ignore this divine order. Whoa! Is Jesus vacillating back and forth like a weed in the wind by saying "don't judge", and then almost immediately turning right around and contradicting what He had just said? Not at all!

Of course the words of Christ do not stand or fall on the confirmation or endorsement of anyone else, but Paul echoed the teaching of the Lord when he affirmed that the Jews were not in a position to be hypocritically judging the Gentiles, being equally guilty of having violated God's law — read carefully Romans 2:21-23.

In John 7:24, Jesus again said, *"Do not judge"*, but it is imperative that we note the words that followed. His total statement was, *"Do not judge **according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment**"* (emphasis added). Friends, this is the key to the whole matter of any judging done by us as human beings — judge **righteously**, not maliciously, not hypocritically.

Jesus and those writers of the New Testament (who were inspired by the Holy Spirit) have made it non-negotiable that Christians engage in righteous judging every day of our lives. Let me offer just a few of the multitude of possible illustrations of this truth as found in our New Testament:

1. In Romans 16:17, Paul urged Christians to note (or mark) those in the church who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to what they have been taught. It is impossible to do this without comparing the Scriptures with contrary teachings, and ultimately arriving at a judgment on the matter.
2. Paul, in 1 Timothy 6:20 and 2 Timothy 2:23, said to *"avoid profane*

and vain babblings", as well as *"foolish and ignorant disputes"*. To be faithful in doing this we must be able to judge what is profane, vain, foolish, and ignorant.

3. 1 Corinthians 15:33 exhorts us to not keep company with "evil" people, who will corrupt our good behavior. To be obedient in this we must be able to determine, or judge, who or what is evil and who or what is not. Surely that must be done on the basis of what is taught in the Bible, but it still requires some judging on our part.
4. Paul makes it abundantly clear in 1 Corinthians 6:5 that the church is to have men who can handle necessary judging of matters of conflict between fellow Christians.
5. In 2 John 9-11, the apostle John calls upon the church to reject any who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ. Making a determination that someone is not abiding in the doctrine of Christ is the same thing as making a judgment.
6. Another very apparent teaching that is in conflict with much of today's thinking regarding judging is found in 1 John 4:1: *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."* Determining whether a *"spirit"* is of God, or whether one is a *"false prophet"* necessitates judging based on the Word of God.
7. We have a command from the apostle Paul, *"...in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us"* (2 Thessalonians 3:6), once again making it quite clear that Jesus never intended His words in Matthew 7:1 to be interpreted as a prohibition of all kinds of judging on the part of men.

These few are representative of the great many examples of righteous judging that the New Testament calls upon Christians to make.

It is essential that we understand that there are indeed judgments that we absolutely have no authority to make. Included among these are judgments that are rendered with an un-Christian attitude. Also included are those judgments which belong only to God and Christ. We have no authority whatsoever to thrust ourselves into areas of judgment which are solely matters for the Godhead. It is not that difficult to determine from the Scriptures which matters of judgment belong to the Father and the Son, as opposed to those for which we are responsible.

Let us not succumb to peer pressure that would have us to refrain from making those kinds of judgments for which we will one day be held accountable. ✝

Table of Contents

God

The Teacher ..... John Gipson 11
Prayer ... Is Powerful ..... Dayton Keesee 12

Evidences

Me and Myself ..... Betty Burton Choate 14
Evolution and the Bible ..... Bob Spurlin 16

The Word of God

The Guiding Light ..... Mike Yates 19
A Summary of the Bible ..... Franklin Camp 20

Doctrine to Live By

Strange Things ..... Sunny David 22
Matthew 19:9 ... . Frank Chesser 24

Salvation

"As the Lord Had Commanded" ... Loy Mitchell 28
The Righteousness of God ..... Don L. Norwood 29
The New Creature and the New Birth .... James W. Farris 30
Forgiveness Is Not Yours to Give ..... Bob Plunkett 31
"A Way" in a Manger ... Michael L. King 32

The Church

Friends in the Church ..... Charles Hodge 34
First Century Christianity ..... Charles Box 36

Church Growth

The Secret to Waking (5) ... . John-Mark Wilson 38

Church and Bible History

Persecution and Endurance..... Dr. Hans Grimm 43

Christianity in Action

007 in Any Town ..... Mike Benson 47
The Salvation of our Own ... . Jesus Rodriguez 50
Growing Up ..... Stan Mitchell 52
We All Need Somebody ..... Joe W. Nichols 54

Daily Christian Living

How Much Does It Cost ...? ..... Jerry Jenkins 55
Persistence ..... Roy Beasley 57
A Perfect World ..... Wayne Barrier 59
Signs on the Road of Life ..... Owen Cosgrove 61
Flee, Fight, and Follow ..... Francis David 63
Unto the Least of These ..... Jane McWhorter 66

THE CHRISTIAN HOME

The Gift of Time ..... Dale Grissom 68
There's a Hole in the Wall ..... Joe Barnett.....69
What Are the Priorities at Your House? .... Wendell Winkler 70
Unbelievable! ..... Hugo McCord 71

PROVERBS 17:22

Humor 72

BIBLE CHARACTERS

He Is Dead and Yet He Speaks .... Max Patterson 75
Abraham ..... Hans J. Dederscheck 76
Moses — ..... Jack Harriman.....78
Caleb, a Man of God ..... Ken Tyler 80

BIBLE QUESTIONS

When Should Children Be Baptized? .... David R. Pharr.....81
Did Jacob See God? ..... Wayne Jackson 82
Who Is the Angel of the Lord? ..... T. Pierce Brown.....83

CHARTS AND OUTLINES

Virtuous Women Are Needed.....E. Claude Gardner.....85
Results of Obedience by Faith ..... Dillard Thurman 87
How to Relate Wisely to Others ..... Joe Hunnicut 88

TEXTUAL STUDIES

Let Us Forget ..... Clarence DeLoach, Jr. 90
The Way of the Righteous ... . Gary C. Hampton.....91
"My Heart Is Fixed, O God" ..... Maxie B. Boren 93

COMFORT AND REASSURANCE

The Problem of Suffering and Evil ..... George Akpabli 94
Miscarriages — ... . Brad Harrub 98

FEATURES, POEMS AND FILLERS

The Final Home ..... J.C. Choate..... Inside Front
Editorial: Whatever Happened to Modesty? .... J.C. Choate 4
Editorial: To Judge, or Not to Judge .... Byron Nichols 6
Verse Search 18
How Do You Spell "Cross"?.... Neal Pollard 27
How Do You Measure Up? 46
What a Passion for Evangelism Does ... Bob Crass 53
Who Am I? 74
Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses 89

FROM THE HEART OF . . .

Costa Rica 102

The Teacher

John Gipson

There was no lack of religious teaching in the Palestine of the first century. The scribe was a familiar figure both in Galilee and Judea. He was met everywhere — in the synagogue, the marketplace, in the houses of the rich. He was known and greeted with respect wherever he went. With him were numerous attached followers and eager scholars who were expected to retain the material taught and to transmit it without variation. He was often referred to as a "lawyer" or a "teacher of the law".

Among these various religious teachers came *The Teacher!* He was one who taught, not as the scribes and Pharisees, but as one having authority. Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, addressed Jesus by saying, *"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him"* (John 3:2).

Nicodemus was right. Jesus was a teacher come from God! Moreover, the Father gave Him commandment what to say and what to speak. For this reason you can understand why God would say of Jesus, *"This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased;* ***listen to him"*** (Matthew 17:5).

While the world has known many teachers, there is none like Jesus. He was in the beginning *with* God, and *was* God. In Him *"are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,"* and He cares for us. This Teacher alone holds the key to life — abundant and eternal.

How long has it been since you have sat at the feet of Jesus? Has He provided your continuing education? Why seek out those whose knowledge is partial when The Teacher is here?

We cannot afford to reject His instruction, as some did during His personal ministry. Of them He said, *"The queen of the South will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here"* (Matthew 12:42).

Great privileges entail great responsibilities. Listen to The Teacher! ✞

John Gipson is a preacher and elder with the Wind Song Church of Christ in Little Rock, Arkansas, USA.



Prayer... Is Powerful and Effective

Dayton Keesee

What a concept! In a world of individuals burdened with multiple needs, there is the sublime and divine decree, *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective"* (James 5:16).

Under the title, "Why Prayer Could Be Good Medicine," Dianne Hales in the March 12, 2003 issue of *Parade Magazine*, makes reference to "hundreds of scientific investigations into faith and healing" (page 4). This is referred to as "a new frontier for medical research." This identifies another dramatic example of where science is trying to catch up with Scripture! Two thousand years ago Paul exhorted, *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"* (Philippians 4:6,7).

Clearing the Air

It needs to be clearly understood that human utterances to an unseen ear are no magical panacea for human problems. Prayer must be by someone, to someone, about something. Paul wrote, *"...present your requests to God."* The success of prayer is not just *saying* a prayer, but confidence in the Source to whom it is said. Therefore, James wrote, *"...when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord"* (James 1:6,7). Therefore, the key is not in man or in a prayer expressed by man, but rather through man's faith in the One to whom the prayer is expressed. Paul stated it well: *"Not*

that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5).

God's Sufficiency Makes Prayer Powerful

Prayer is powerful because it addresses God, who *"is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us"* (Ephesians 3:20). God's power can relate to us, for us, and in us. Science may still be researching this matter, but David through Scriptures assured us of this potential some 3,000 years ago. Note the wide range of emotional, physical, and spiritual needs in just the 6th Psalm, verses 2-9:

"Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am faint; O Lord, heal me for my bones are in agony. My soul is in anguish...Turn, O Lord, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love... I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes...The Lord has heard my weeping. The Lord has heard my cry for mercy; the Lord accepts my prayer."

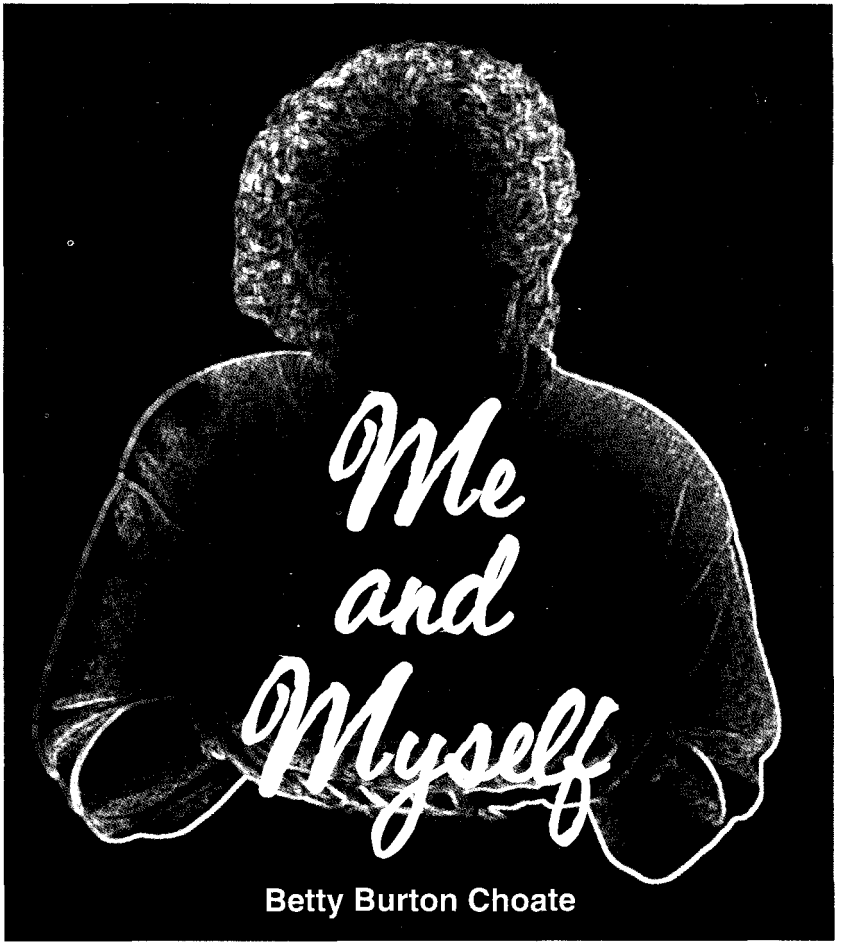
There are so many human needs, and in so many ways God is sufficient! Even death is swallowed up in victory through the Lord Jesus Christ, or as Paul put it, *"For to me to live is Christ and to die is gain"* (Philippians 1:21; see also 1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Hebrews 5:8,9; Romans 6:3-5).

These grand, Biblical facts should lead each reader to say with the Psalmist: *"I love the Lord, for He heard my voice; He heard my cry for mercy. Because He turned His ear to me, I will call on Him as long as I live"* (Psalm 116:1,2).

It is vital for us to note that throughout the Scriptures, those who were urged to pray, and those whose prayers were heard and answered, were those in a praying relationship with God. David was God's anointed; those addressed in the letters to the churches and individuals in the New Testament were all a part of the church. God's promises of succor and help, in answer to prayers, are to His children who have the right of children to petition their Father. If we have this relationship with God, we must be *faithful* children. If we have not yet been born into His family, we must first *obey* Him before His promises apply to us (John 9:31).

Don't forget to pray! Prayer is powerful. ✞

Dayton Keesee is a preacher living in Midwest City, Oklahoma, USA.



Genesis 2:7 explains, *"And the LORD God formed* ***man of the dust of the ground,*** *and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became* ***a living being*** **[soul]** (Genesis 2:7). Discussing the subject of death, Solomon said, *"Then the* ***DUST*** *will return to the earth as it was, And* ***the SPIRIT*** *will return to God who gave it"* (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

This separation/union of man's dual being is described further in these words: *"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from*

God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life" (2 Corinthians 5:1-4).

Also, 1 Corinthians 15 explains that when the physical body dies and is buried, it looks toward a resurrection. The word *resurrection,* itself, demands the "bringing to life again" of that physical body which was dead, but "clothed upon" now with immortality: *"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed — in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"* (1 Corinthians 15:51-53).

We see our physical body, but no one has ever seen a soul. In the absence of visible confirmation, how has the belief in the existence of "the inner man" persisted through these many centuries?

Of course we have testimony and explanations in God's word, so those of us who believe its inspiration realize that we have confirmation from the Creator, Himself. But is there other evidence that we — you and I — are actually a soul (an inner man) housed in a physical body (the outer man)?

Do we not have an inescapable testimony from within our own selves? I have a constant awareness of "self" — I exist, as a logical, thinking being, and I feel my own very definite identity. But strangely, even though "I" have lived in this physical body more than six decades, and even though I identify with it as also being "myself", yet the "me" inside is often shocked when it looks in the mirror and sees the "me" outside! I, like other humans, don't "feel my age"! Why? For the simple reason that "the outer man" is decaying, while "the inner man" is being renewed continually by its spiritual life! *"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day"* (2 Corinthians 4:16)

Our own, often unanalyzed, awareness of the separate identities of this physical body and the soul that it houses is constant testimony of the fact that we are dual beings! ✞

Betty Burton Choate is Layout Editor of *The Voice of Truth International* and lives in Winona, Mississippi, USA.

Evolution and the Bible

Bob Spurlin

We cannot successfully deny the fact that belief in God and the theory of evolution are involved in a life and death struggle for existence. The Christian is laboring under a false assumption who thinks that the theory of evolution is no threat to faith. This writer has even heard Christians declare their belief that the theory of evolution and faith in God are totally compatible (Hebrews 11:3). What a foolish and uninformed conclusion to reach!

Some brethren among us think they can reconcile the Bible account of creation and the theory of evolution through belief in "theistic evolution": the idea that most of the statements in Genesis 1 and 2 are figurative (which means that they are actually saying nothing specific), and that even though *God* did the initial "creating", the *method* He used for developing His universe was a natural evolutionary process.

But the Christian cannot reach such conclusions through a rational process based on faith. The Bible makes three claims about the nature of creation which can never be harmonized with the evolutionist's creed.

First, the Bible claims a perfect, full-grown creation from the beginning. The Genesis description shows that God created the first living things completely mature and in full possession of the power of reproduction. There was no "development" toward perfection or from one stage to another.

Six times in the first chapter of Genesis (1:4;10,12,18,21, and 25), the record says that God evaluated His handiwork as "good". The Biblical account of the world's origin does not suggest upheaval, disorder or "struggle for survival,", as the evolutionists claim. All things were operating in perfect harmony and order from the moment of creation! Whereas the theory of evolution demands that we view things as going from simple to complex, from a disordered arrangement to a more orderly one, the Bible says the process is working in exact reverse: things were perfect in their original state, only to be subjected to degeneration and decay by the introduction of sin.

Second, the Bible claims a complete creation in six days. The six days of man's work-week are comparable to the creation-week of Genesis one: The Bible says: *"For in six days the Lord made the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in*

them is, and rested the seventh day" (Exodus 20:11). The *"works were finished from the foundation of the world"* (Hebrews 4:3). An evolutionist, and even some among us, are suggesting that the "day" during the creative work of God was millions and even billions of years in length. The word translated "day" in the Old Testament, "Yom", always referred to a literal day of twenty-four hours when modified by such words as "first," "second," "third," etc. Surely, we can see that the language of the Bible does not permit the possibility of a gradually-developing universe.

Third, the results of creation were produced in a non-evolutionary manner. Each living unit of creation reproduces *"after its kind"* (Genesis 1:11-25). It has never happened that two lower life-forms mated to give birth to a higher life-form. For example, a male and female cat cannot reproduce a cow or horse, because such a theory does not follow the creative process of reproducing "after its kind". Those who embrace the theory of evolution believe a process that is contradictory to the Bible and to all known science.

Evolutionists assert the premise that it requires millions of years for a living thing to change from a lower to a higher life-form. Yet, their scenarios of just **how these graduations took place, from one life form to another,** are described in words such as "perhaps", "it is believed", "possibly", etc. Close analysis shows that they are nothing more than modern-day fairy tales, developed by people whose first intent is to disprove the existence of God and His part in creation. The theory of evolution is just that — an unproved and unprovable *theory* — and nothing more! ✝

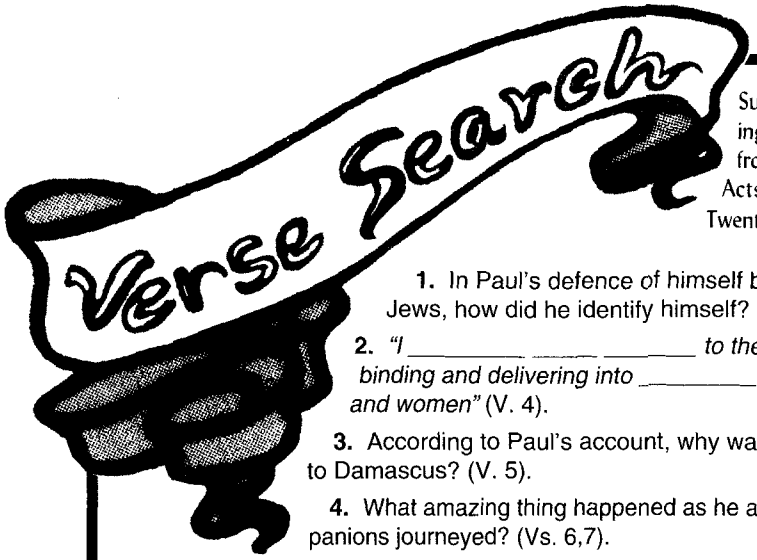
Bob Spurlin is a writer living in Somerville, Alabama, USA.

Fall or Place

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31).

Fall? Into His hands?
Oh, no! I choose to place
Myself into His hands,
Myself into His grace.
The chances are quite
strong
That should a person "fall"
He'd much regret the fact
He didn't take his all
And place it in the hands
Of the living, loving God —
And there submit himself
Beneath God's chastening
rod.

Mrs. E.E. Fulop



Supply the missing information from the book of Acts, chapter Twenty-two, NKJV.

1. In Paul's defence of himself before the Jews, how did he identify himself? (Vs. 1-3).

2. *"I _____ _____ _____ to the _____, binding and delivering into _____ both men and women"* (V. 4).

3. According to Paul's account, why was he going to Damascus? (V. 5).

4. What amazing thing happened as he and his companions journeyed? (Vs. 6,7).

5. What question was asked? Since Saul was persecuting Christians, what did this say about the relationship of Christ to His followers? (V. 7).

6. The speaker identified Himself as whom? (V. 8).

7. Did Jesus tell Saul what to do to be saved? (V. 10).

8. _____, a Christian, came to Saul after Saul _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ for three days and nights (V. 12; 9:9-18).

9. What did Ananias ask Saul? (V. 16).

10. Why did Jesus tell Saul (Paul) to leave Jerusalem when he was there soon after his conversion? (Vs. 17,18).

11. What had Saul done at the time of Stephen's death, recorded in Acts 2? (V. 20).

12. Then Jesus said what? (V. 21).

13. What did the Jewish audience do when Paul said that he had been sent to teach the hated Gentiles? (Vs. 22,23).

14. Who saved Paul from the mob? (V. 24).

15. When he would have beaten Paul, to learn why there was such a tumult, how did Paul challenge him? (V. 25).

16. What did the commander do the next day, in order to understand why the Jews so vehemently opposed Paul? (V. 30).

[See inside of back cover for answers.]

The Guiding Light

Mike Yates

Think on these things:

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts" (2 Peter 3:3). Today we might refer to these scoffers as doubters. Why are so many people doubters when it comes to God's word? A poet, whose identity is unknown to me, penned the following thoughts concerning this topic:

How often we trust each other
And only doubt our Lord,
We take the word of mortals
And yet distrust His word.
But, oh, what light and glory
Would shine o'er all our days,
If we always would remember
God means just what He says.

In 1970, the Liberian tanker *Arrow* ran aground off Nova Scotia, broke into two halves and sank. The oil it was carrying floated to shore, polluting up to 125 miles of shoreline. Its Greek captain admitted that he did see an echo on his radar, indicating land, but he dismissed it as false.

This story has a shocking likeness to the tragedy of the *Titanic*. This great vessel and so many precious lives could have been saved if those in charge had taken the warnings more seriously — if they had not trusted so completely in the judgment and pride of men.

In the shattered world in which we live there exists a saving light that is so bright it causes the evil of darkness to flee in fear. I speak of God's word, the only perfect plan for man's salvation. Yet so many scoff at its precious words of life.

We want a life preserver, but we refuse to put it on.

We want a Savior, but we refuse to take His hand.

We want a life boat, but we refuse to get in.

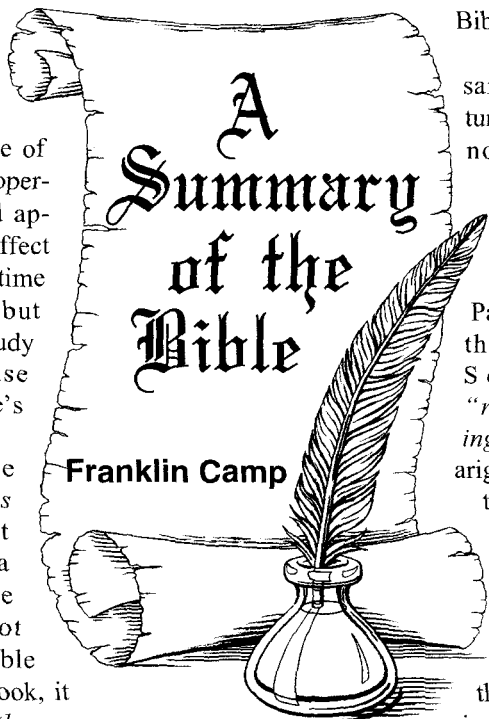
In fact, it appears that many are expecting God to expend all the effort in saving us, while we ourselves do nothing.

God created us, He offered His Son for our sins, He gave us His written will to show us the way. By His Grace He has done all that He is going to do. The next move is ours...

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). ✞

Mike Yates preaches in Dexter, Missouri, USA.

There are some things one needs to carefully consider as one engages in the study of the Bible. This book which we are studying is no ordinary book. It may affect us in one of two ways: properly studied and applied, it will affect us for good in time and eternity, but an improper study of it will cause one to lose one's soul.



The Bible is *every man's* book. It is not intended for a special, elite *group, for not* only is the Bible every man's book, it is written for *the average person.* Scholars may study it and be challenged by its content, but it was not written with scholars necessarily in mind.

No one ever outgrows the Scriptures. The more individuals study them, the wider and deeper they become.

The Bible is a book which enables the reader to look into eternity. The best evidence of the inspiration of the Bible is to be found between its covers. No one will ever be a useful Christian unless one is a student of the Bible.

Matthew Henry said, "The Scriptures were written not to make us astronomers, but to make us saints." It is no wonder that Paul urged Timothy to study the Scriptures, *"rightly dividing,"* or handling aright, the word of truth, that he might be an approved workman before God.

The Bible is the greatest book in the world. It is the most accessible, and in it one finds truth that can be found in no other writings.

The Bible is the only book that can give a satisfactory explanation of God, the world, man, sin, salvation, service, and life here and life hereafter.

The Bible acknowledges man's faults, it is patient with man's weaknesses, it is severe with man's sins,

and it is honest with his virtues and his hopes.

To own the Bible is to be rich. To study the Bible is to be wise; to obey it, to be strong. To know and to trust the Bible is to find life.

To be a student of the Bible and to handle it aright is the greatest accomplishment within the reach of any person. One may know English, astronomy, literature, music, sociology and philosophy, but if he does not know the Bible, he has failed in the only subject that brings all things into their proper relationship and that enables one to know life at its best.

The person who seeks to understand the Bible will endeavor to study its contents book-by-book, meet its characters as they unfold through its pages, study its types, its doctrine, its topics, paragraphs, sentences, and words. This is a lifetime work, a work that grows in richness as one's knowledge increases.

The Bible is the one book that can save many a heartache. The following was found on the fly-leaf of a Bible placed by the Gideons in a motel in Birmingham, Alabama: "May God bless the man who placed this book here. I am a young lady twenty-one years old, fatherless and motherless. Tonight this book saved me from taking a wrong step. May the next reader find it the comfort that I did."

There is no greater accomplishment in life than to be able to rightly divide the word of truth. It is worth all the sacrifice that is necessary in order to make such a study. One can never be great in the true sense of that word if he does not know the Bible, love it, live it, delight in it, and teach it without perversion and without misrepresentation.

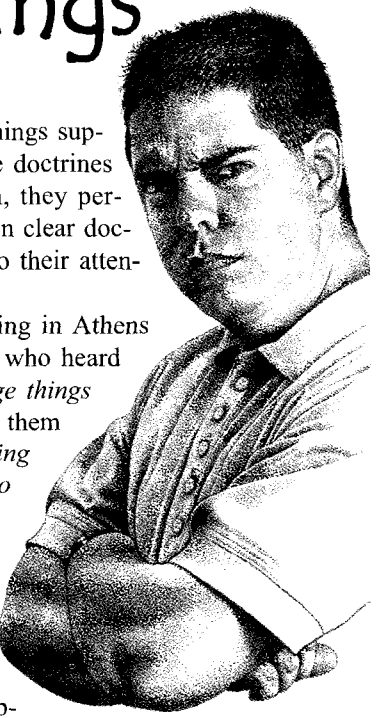
The one who studies this book and knows how to handle it is in a position to render the greatest service to the world. No wonder Paul told Timothy, (1) to study, (2) to be a workman, and (3) to seek to be approved of God. There is no higher ambition on earth.

The Bible is a mirror that enables us to see ourselves. It is food which supplies the strength we need, a lamp to guide our way, a hammer to break and to build, a sword to fight and to defend, the seed to plant and grow, and the goal to own and to become our reward.

There are no experiences in life for which the Bible does not furnish guidance. May these thoughts lend encouragement to all of us to become diligent students of the word that we may know the way of life and find the life that is life indeed. ✞

Franklin Camp, preacher of the Gospel for many years, is deceased.

Strange Things



Sunny David

For years people have heard many things supposedly taught in the Bible. Since these doctrines have been repeated over and over again, they perceive them to be "Bible truth". Yet, when clear doctrines from the Bible itself are brought to their attention, they sound strange to their ears.

When Paul, the apostle, was preaching in Athens about the true and the living God, those who heard him said, *"You are bringing some strange things to our ears"* (Acts 17:20). Paul had told them that, *"...the One whom you are worshipping without knowing, Him I am proclaiming to you."* They were worshipping God, but they didn't know Him. They didn't know His will. Their worship was based on their own imaginations. They were following traditions they had learned from others. And the truth of the matter was that they were not worshipping the one true and living God in a way that was acceptible to Him. Hearing Paul preach of God, they exclaimed, *"You are bringing some strange things to our ears."*

Today, many Bible-loving people find it very strange when it is called to their attention that **according to the Bible one cannot be saved from sin by only believing in Christ, or by faith alone,** as they have heard from different religious teachers most of their lives. The Bible clearly teaches that **to be saved, not only must one believe in Christ, but one must also repent of sin, and confess Christ to be the Son of God and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins.** Christ, the Saviour, taught *"He who believes and is baptized will be saved..."* (Mark 16:16). Further, the apostle Peter exhorted his listeners to, *"Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins"* (Acts 2:38). Again, when the eunuch, after hearing the

Gospel wanted to be baptized, Phillip told him *"If you believe with all your heart, you may."* Reading these facts from the Bible, why should these things sound strange to any sincere person?

Likewise, to most religiously inclined people, it sounds strange that **according to the Bible there is only one true church.** In Matthew 16:18 **Christ promised to build *His* church.** And Acts 2:47 says that **Christ Himself adds the saved ones to His church, daily.** Furthermore, He Himself is the **head of the church,** which is **His spiritual body** (Ephesians 1:22,23; Colossians 1:18). The Bible does not *condone* but definitely *condemns* division and denominationalism (1 Corinthians 1:10-13). The church of Christ is neither Catholic nor Protestant. God is not the author of confusion but of peace and unity (1 Corinthians 14:33).

Does the fact sound strange to you that **the Bible is completely silent about the month and the date on which Christ was born on earth?** That neither the church nor Christians from the beginning celebrated any religious festivals such as "Christmas", "Good Friday" and "Easter"? That **babies were never baptized,** but always those who were **penitent believers were told to be baptized or immersed in water** (Romans 6:3-5)? That **the church in her worship always sang praises without the accompaniment of any musical instrument** (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 13:15)? That **women were taught to be silent in the church** and were not permitted to speak or teach, usurping authority over the men (1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:11,12)?

In religion, sadly, Biblical truths have been called "a lie", while man-created doctrines have been called "truth" so often that "the truth has become a lie, while the lie has become the truth" in the hearts of most people.

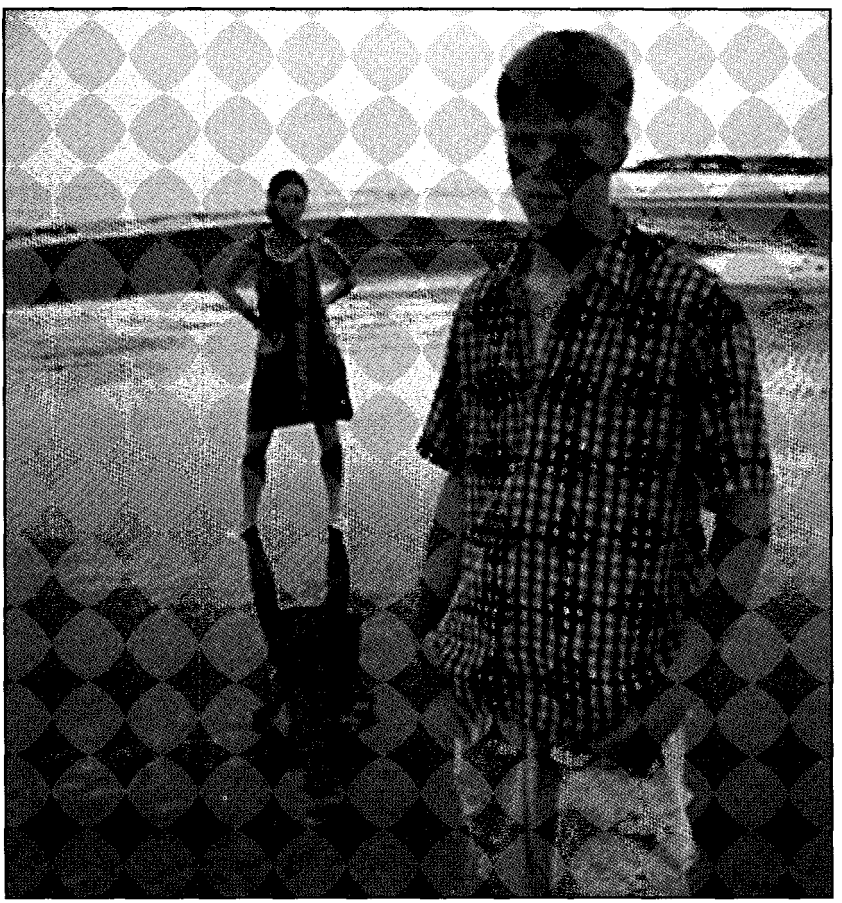
These and many other truths from the New Testament sound strange to people today because they have never heard them taught by their religious leaders. But **genuine truth does not change.** On the day of Judgment we shall all be judged, as Christ said in John 12:48, **by His word** and not by what men have taught through the years. ✞

Sunny David works with the church of Christ in New Delhi, India, editing the monthly magazine, *The Bible Teacher*, and preaching over nation-wide radio.

Matthew 19:9 and God's Attitude Toward Divorce

Frank Chesser

"And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."



"For the Lord, the God of Israel saith that he hateth putting away" (Malachi 2:16). Thus, God hates divorce. In clear, succinct terms, God set forth His attitude toward the rupture of the marital state. Even in divorces involving an innocent party, barring penitence and celibacy on the part of the guilty, a precious soul is postured on the road to eternal ruin. *"The way of transgressors is hard"* (Proverbs 13:15). There is nothing trivial about the dissolution of a marriage.

Any doctrine that is inconsistent with God's attitude toward divorce is a false doctrine. Such is the case with regard to the limitation of God's marriage law to Christians: the idea currently being put forward, that the statement of Christ in Matthew 19:9 applies only to Christians, and that God does not legislate concerning marriages and divorces among non-Christians. This doctrine leaves the inconceivable masses of humanity, in the non-covenant world, void of any law to govern their sexual conduct or to promote fidelity in their marriages. This humanly-devised theory literally *encourages* the very thing God *hates*. It is a loathsome dogma that is wholly incompatible with the very nature of God and His attitude toward divorce.

But how do we know that God's law applies to all people? The text shows that Jesus did not limit His words to the "Christian era" that was about to begin. Rather, in verses 4 and 5 of Matthew 19, at the beginning of the discussion concerning marriage, He went all the way back to the creation of Adam and Eve, and to God's will concerning marriage from the beginning:

> *Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?*
>
> *So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.*
>
> *They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?"*
>
> *He said to them, "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."*
>
> *His disciples said to Him, "If*

such is the case of the man with his wife, it is better not to marry."

But He said to them, "All cannot accept this saying, but only those to whom it has been given: For there are eunuchs who were born thus from their mother's womb, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He who is able to accept it, let him accept it."

Nowhere does Jesus limit this command to those who are Christians. Marriage is an institution for all of humanity.

The disciples reacted as many do today, thinking that the rule was too difficult for men to follow. Did Jesus back down and soften the command? No, He simply concluded that some would obey and some would not. He left the *choice of obedience* to humans. **But *the right to legislate* concerning the law, He reserved for Himself.**

Equally troubling is the concept that "adultery" is limited to the *literal act* of disobedience in choosing to divorce and remarry, and does not include the union of the two people involved. This doctrine says that **one must only repent of the *disobedience,* to sanctify the subsequent sexual cohabitation.**

Humanly speaking, this approach is most desirable. If this were true, the awesome problem of divorce and remarriage would scarcely be a problem at all. One could receive divine sanction of multiple marriages by exhibiting a penitent spirit. If a man can repent of personal transgression seven times in one day (Luke 17:4), surely he can repent of the act of divorce and remarriage numerous times in the course of a lifetime and thus enjoy, by divine approval, a variety of sexual partners.

But humans have not been given the right to legislate in this matter. God is the authority, and He has spoken clearly: This erroneous doctrine encourages divorce, the object of God's hatred.

Conversely, the stringent nature of Matthew 19:9 is God's answer to the rampancy of divorce. It discourages the severing of the marital state, promotes faithfulness, and provides motivation for intense effort in solving marital problems. In striking contrast to the theories of men, Matthew 19:9 is in perfect harmony with God's attitude toward divorce. He hates divorce, while He supports and sanctifies marriage. And He wants all humans to do the same, for the sake of the souls, the home, and children involved. ✝

Frank Chesser preaches for the Panama Street church in Montgomery, Alabama, USA.

How Do You Spell "Cross"?

Neal Pollard

"SEE" — Look at Calvary. Don't turn away. I know it's not easy. What is done to Him is shameful. I know. But, look closely! Past the spittle. Beyond the blood. There. In His eyes. Friend, that is love. It is love for you! See the nails in His hands and feet, fastening Him to a tree He created for man's use. Look at the love He has for you!

"Are?" — Are you able to see that He bled and died for you? Are you willing to admit you're lost without Him? Are you ready to submit to His will, to obey Him, and live for Him? Are you prepared for eternity? Are you convinced?

"OH!" — Hear His cries of pain and agony. The death of a thousand deaths. Bitter moans of His disciples. The gasp of heaven's angels. The sorrow of a Father for His only begotten Son! The gasps and exclamations of a hateful mob.

"SS" — That's the hiss of the beguiling serpent. The one who is bruising the heal of the perfect One, putting God The Son in the tomb. This is the moment of his triumph. Though resurrection will soon bring the ultimate victory for Christ and hope for man, at the cross of Calvary the devil must be enjoying his front-row seat. Doesn't he anger you? Disgust you? Motivate you? Live for Jesus. Don't live for the snake!

Friends, the cross spells the difference between heaven and hell, hope and hopelessness, joy and sorrow, night and day! The cross spells LIFE!!!

"As the Lord Had Commanded"

Loy Mitchell

"Then Moses looked over all the work, and indeed they had done it; as the Lord had commanded, just so they had done it. And Moses blessed them" (Exodus 39:43).

Good news! Moses had been instructed by God to build a tabernacle. He inspected the work and found that all had been done *"as the Lord had commanded."* I like that message. God's commands are not burdensome. Every commandment of God is good and right. Not one command of God is bad or harmful to man. Yes, it was a great day, for the Israelites had done the work as commanded by God.

Dear reader, are you doing what the Lord has commanded? Put yourself to the test as you read the following passages.

Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ

"Then he led them outside and asked, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' They answered, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you and your household will be saved'" (Acts 16:30,31).

Repent of Every Sin

"No, I assure you, but unless you change your hearts (repent), *all of you will perish"* (Luke 13:5).

Confess Jesus Before Men

"Everyone who acknowledges (confesses) *me in the presence of men, I will also acknowledge him in the presence of my heavenly Father; and whoever denies me in the presence of men, I will also deny him in the presence of my heavenly Father"* (Matthew 10:32,33).

Be Baptized for the Forgiveness of Sin

"Peter said to them, 'Change your hearts (repent), *and let each of you be immersed* (baptized) *in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins might be forgiven, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'"* (Acts 2:38).

Always Abound in the Work of God

"So, my beloved brothers, be firm, unshakable, always abounding in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

By Our Obedience We Show Our Love

"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

It is not enough to simply *know* His commandments. The question is, do you *keep* His commandments? ✝

Loy Mitchell preaches for the Northside congregation in Topeka, Kansas, USA.

The Righteousness of God

Don L. Norwood

As we talk about the righteousness of God in this article, we are not referring to the personal righteousness of God. We are talking, instead, about the righteousness of a person who obeys the Gospel of Christ and becomes righteous as he is cleansed by the blood of Christ.

A sinner who is spiritually reborn (John 3:3,5; Titus 3:4-6) enjoys being righteous in God's sight. *"He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins"* (Colossians 1:13,14). This new righteousness *in* God is that acceptable spiritual state that one attains because he has entered into Christ (Galatians 3:26-29) and is now a citizen of the kingdom of God (Philippians 3:20).

The Jews believed in the true and living God, but when they rejected Christ and His teaching, they could not be acceptable to God (Romans 9:30-32; 10:1-4). They tried to obtain righteousness by doing the works of the Law of Moses, but that law was not given so that they could obtain righteousness before God through their own works. It was designed, rather, to show them that they were sinners and needed a Savior, and then to lead them to the Messiah and to God's grace (Galatians 3:19-25).

Christ paid the redeeming price with His life, and sinners can obtain salvation and righteousness before God only by believing that Christ died for man's sins, that He was buried and raised from the dead on the third day, and that He ascended to heaven to intercede for sinful mankind (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; Hebrews 7:25). Man's **faith** in Christ as Lord, followed by **his willingness to obey the doctrine of Christ** make it possible for him to be saved. *"And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him"* (Hebrews 5:9).

Are you one who is a partaker of the righteousness of God? ✝

Don L. Norwood is a full-time missionary to India. When in America he lives in Mason, Texas, USA.

The New Creature and the New Birth

James W. Farris

The concept of newness is an important theme in the Bible. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul said, *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold all things have become new."* It is a marvelous blessing to be clean, refreshed, new, and restored to God. The very idea that God can bring a person from a sinful and lost state into a reconciled position with Him is beyond human imagination. Those of the world who are not "new creatures" are still in their sins and do not have the eternal hope of Heaven. How then does one go about becoming a new creature?

Jesus Christ said in John 3:5, *"Unless a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* This **new birth** is required for being **a new creature!** We know that the sins of man cause his division or separation from God (Isaiah 59:1,2). And seeing that *all* have sinned (Romans 3:23), it is necessary to have those sins taken away in order for spiritual newness to take place. Paul said that we are *"buried with Him by baptism into death... and raised to walk in newness of life."*

The contact point of *newness* always centers around **a new birth,** and the new birth takes place as one puts to death the old man of sin. Paul declares that those who are baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27). And if anyone is *"in Christ Jesus"* he is a new creation. Simply, then, **one is baptized into Christ.** It is in baptism that forgiveness and remission of sins is accomplished (Acts 2:38).

Why would anyone put off doing what is required to be a new creature in the eyes of God? Truly, *"Why tarriest thou, arise and be baptized, washing away thy sins and calling on the name of the Lord."*

Let us remember that those *in Christ* are new creatures and are called to *"walk in newness of life"* (Romans 6:4). When we Christians fall, we have the promise that God hears our cries for forgiveness and salvation (1 John 1:9).

For this cause, let us live each day as though we are His people and His creatures. We live in newness. Surely this concept is a driving force in our lives of dedication toward God. May God help and bless us all as we live diligently for Him. ✞

James W. Farris works with the Petersville Church of Christ in Florence, Alabama, USA.

peace" (Ephesians 2:13,14).

During Old Testament times the veil separated the portals of glory from those who could enter only the holy place. That veil was rent from top to the bottom upon the death of Jesus, by which a bold entrance was allowed into the "holiest" through the blood of Christ after sins were remitted (Hebrews 10:17-20).

As the preaching of the disciples of Jesus intensified *"concerning the kingdom of God"*, the result was that, *"some spake evil of that way..."* (Acts 19:9). *His* way had now become *their* way, which was holiness through His kingdom, the church.

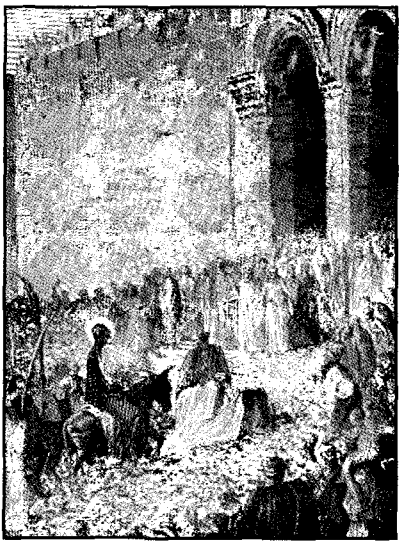
Paul, while yet Saul, admitted, *"I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women"* (Acts 22:4). After learning the truth and being added to the Lord's kingdom, Paul fell under heavy accusations and charges by those who were enemies of Christ. He boldly declared, *"But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust"* (Acts 24:14,15).

Following Paul's defense, Felix, *"having a more perfect knowledge of that way"* concerning *"Righteousness temperance, and judgment to come,"* he [Felix] *"trembled"* and granted Paul privileges (Acts 24:14,22).

Solomon said, *"There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death"* (Proverbs 14:12). In defining the perfect and only acceptable way, Jesus declared, *"I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"* (John 14:6).

Are you looking for salvation? You can find "a way in a manger"? ✞

Michael L. King preaches for the Lakeside Church of Christ in Orange Park, Florida, USA.



Friends in the Church

Charles Hodge

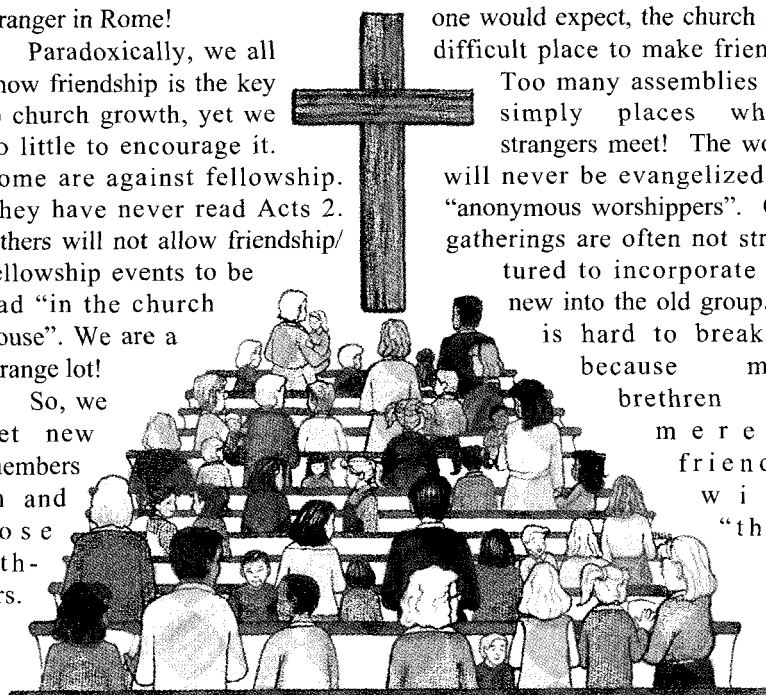
Friends! Friends in the church! Everytime members have needs down at the hospital or cemetery I wonder what do people do who don't have church friends?!?! Paul was an evangelist, yet his greatest ability was to make friends. He had never worshipped with the saints at Rome (Read Romans 16), yet he already knew the "pillars". He counted them as friends, even brothers. Paul would never be a stranger in Rome!

Paradoxically, we all know friendship is the key to church growth, yet we do little to encourage it. Some are against fellowship. They have never read Acts 2. Others will not allow friendship/fellowship events to be had "in the church house". We are a strange lot!

So, we get new members in and lose others. It is reported that eighty percent of new members are lost within six months. What a tragedy!

Actually, new members are not stable until they have been integrated into the fellowship of the church. Every new member needs a minimum of three church friends; and seven is better! Without this supportive group, he "falls through the cracks".

Sadly, and contrary to all that one would expect, the church is a difficult place to make friends! Too many assemblies are simply places where strangers meet! The world will never be evangelized by "anonymous worshippers". Our gatherings are often not structured to incorporate the new into the old group. It is hard to break in because most brethren are merely friendly with "their



bunch". Some are more comfortable with keeping the church "like it is". We come in late and rush out early.

On the other hand, some members don't want to be in fellowship. They don't want to be friendly. Some have "moved in" for one purpose only — to get lost in the crowd. Others move often from one congregation to another. They do not wish the pain of separation, so they avoid making close ties.

Most of us are too busy — too busy to cultivate deep relationships in the church, which is sad. We are forced to admit that there is no perfect church, as far as the human element is concerned. We all are flawed and fall short of what we should be and want to be. We must try harder to do better. We must teach/practice fellowship. We must reach out to newcomers. We must learn how to love others with the agape love of God.

One of these days *you* will need a friend; one of these days *someone* will need *you* as a friend. But unless the relationships are developed now, they won't be meaningful enough to make a difference when the need arises. Let's resolve now to build friendships within the church, and pray for God's help in carrying out our resolve. ✞

Statements showing love and fellowship among early Christians:

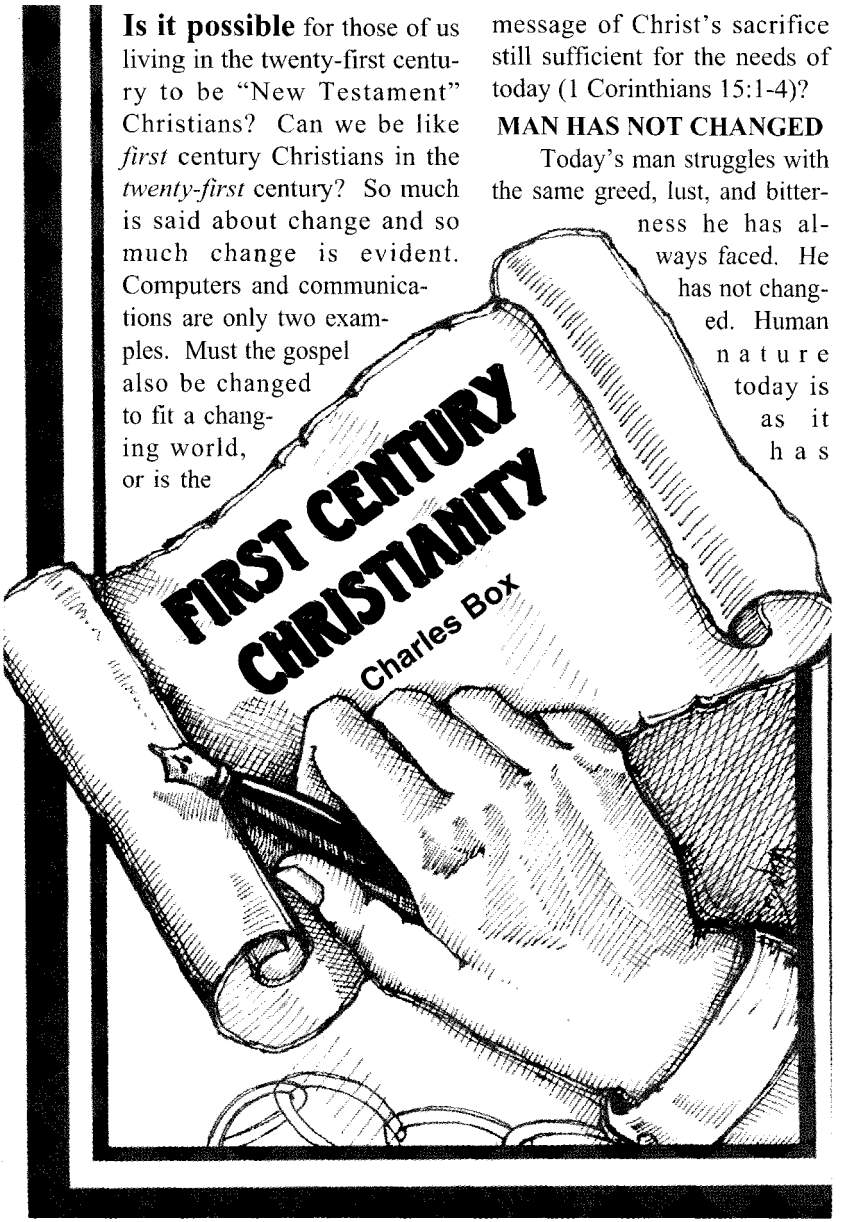
"Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their own necks for my life..." (Romans 16:3).

"For I bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your own eyes and given them to me" (Galatians 4:15).

"But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; though you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity" (Philippians 4:10).

"And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. Then they all wept freely, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him" (Acts 20:36,37).

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Is it possible for those of us living in the twenty-first century to be "New Testament" Christians? Can we be like *first* century Christians in the *twenty-first* century? So much is said about change and so much change is evident. Computers and communications are only two examples. Must the gospel also be changed to fit a changing world, or is the message of Christ's sacrifice still sufficient for the needs of today (1 Corinthians 15:1-4)?

MAN HAS NOT CHANGED

Today's man struggles with the same greed, lust, and bitterness he has always faced. He has not changed. Human nature today is as it has

always been. From the beginning, man has been given the choice of good or evil (Deuteronomy 11:26). Man's nature loves sin. *"But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members"* (Romans 7:23). Man has not changed.

MAN'S PROBLEM HAS NOT CHANGED

In Noah's days people were wicked. *"Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"* (Genesis 6:5). In our day sin is still man's problem. Man is basically sinful. He is un-god-like. *"For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin"* (Ecclesiastes 7:20.). There is no one among accountable people who has not sinned (Romans 3:10,23). Our problem is a common problem to all mankind : **SIN.**

MAN'S HOPE HAS NOT CHANGED

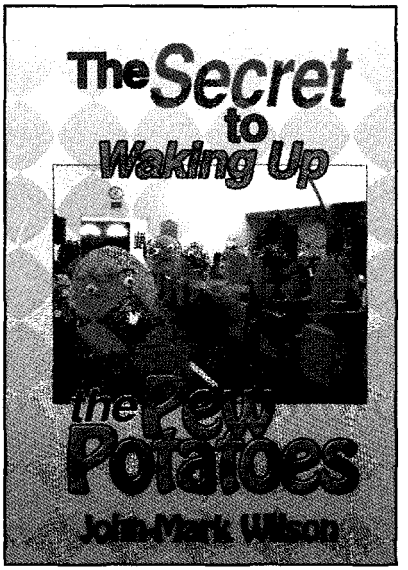
Jesus is our hope. *"To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory"* (Colossians 1:27). Man is the same, and so is sin. Man's hope is also the same — Jesus Christ. He bore our sins in His own body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). If it had not been for the death of Jesus, man would have been without hope. *"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit"* (1 Peter 3:18). Man's hope is in the fact that Jesus suffered sin's penalty in man's place.

First century Christianity *is* possible today. Through a return to the New Testament teaching, in loving obedience to the gospel of Christ, *you can be a Christian only — TODAY* (Acts 2:36-47, Romans 6:1-6)! Have you obeyed the gospel? If not, now is the time to do so. ✝

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"...I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was *once for all* delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3).

Evacuating the Padded Pew



How to Develop Your "Recapturing the Vision" Program!

Part Three: Growing Through Eight Easy Steps

Step One — *Develop a Prospect List*

The first thing that needs to be done, before any contacts are made, is to complete a list of people in the community who you want to invite. Whoever is heading up your program needs to announce that names and telephone numbers will be asked for the next Wednesday evening during the class period. *This program will not work if you simply ask the membership to turn in names to you of people to compile on the list.* If you choose to get names that way, few if any will give you names! What you must do is go **from person to person down all the pews, asking for the name of someone they work with, are friends with, or past members who might attend if invited.**

Many of the names, as you go around the room in older congregations, will be those who have attended in the past and for one reason or another have left their first love. These are fine to have on your prospect list and need to be there, but what you are really looking for are new prospects. There are thousands of people who simply don't attend church services, anywhere, and among these souls is the good ground that Jesus spoke of. The former member, who has

turned his back on Christ, has done so willingly and will be very hard in most cases to coax back into the fold. Many years and prayers are often involved in bringing them back. Therefore, don't expect a rush of wayward members in just a few months.

Get as many names as you can. Write down the contact's name and phone number if they have it. If they don't have the number, ask what it's listed under in the phone book. It doesn't matter how many names you get, whether few or many, remember God is working with you.

Sample Prospect List

Name of Contact _____

Mailing Address _____

_____

Phone Number _____

Church Affiliation _____

Step Two — *Begin a Wednesday Night Soul-Winning Class*

The second easy step is to provide a time to encourage one another. This is best accomplished with a Wednesday night soul-winning class. It's during this class that you will review and update the contacts. New names will be given, while old prospects will be removed. It is essential that you have such a class during the length of your "Recapturing the Vision" program.

I want to begin to explain now the way in which the structure of the program works. Let us say that you asked everyone in the auditorium class to provide you with names. After making sure you have a phone number for each person, you discover that you have 20

prospects. These prospects are the most likely people to attend the assembly and hear the Word of God and so, naturally, you want them to be invited. I have found that when a person in a community gets an invitation from a preacher, he appreciates the invite, but he also assumes that it's the preacher's job to invite him. The way this system works is that the prospect gets invited by 2 different members during a one-week period. This creates within the person who is the good ground a sense of wonder and amazement. They then attend because they understand there are people who truly love and care for them. They want to see what Christian people have to offer.

On the other side, there are some who get upset because they were invited to the assembly. But, don't let that type of person discourage your efforts. They are not the good ground. They are not ready to face the truth of their being eternally lost. You can check back with them later and see if their minds have changed. Many times tragedies within a family will lead them to question their eternal state and the person will become good ground for planting in the future.

Step Three — *Organize Your Volunteers*

During your first Wednesday night soul-winning class, not only do you write down the names of your prospects in the community, but also the members willing to work. Before you ask for volunteers, let the congregation know that "Recapturing the Vision" is an easy system. No one really has to work very hard at all! Unfortunately, most people hate the thought of hard work, so they become apprehensive whenever something new is begun. Comfort them from the very beginning. Let them know that each person who wants to get involved will be responsible for only one small job, whether young or old. When they are relaxed and excited, proceed to ask for volunteers in the following areas:

Attendance Keeper. If you don't already have someone who is keeping up with the attendance in the assembly, you need to ask for a volunteer to record visitors' addresses and phone numbers. This job is invaluable in regard to follow-up that will be made after their visit to the assembly.

Mother's Helper. As you reach out into your community, you will find many single-parent families. This tragic result of our present society seems to be only getting worse. There are also married women with children who will attend if invited, but their husbands do not come along to help with the children. The members must understand that the children will not know how to act in the assembly. What the mother's helper does is sit with the mother and help with controlling her children so the visiting mother is free to listen to the gospel message. Some of the children may be small enough for the nursery but by the age of 3 are plenty big enough to learn how to act during worship.

Monday Card Person. Everyone likes to receive cards. The new contact who visits the assembly and is impressed with the love and biblical pattern of its structure will go home wondering if it was all a "put on". Many people, out in our communities, have been hurt by false religious teaching which makes them skeptical of anything that seems too good to be true. To combat this, the visitor needs to know that members of the church were not just acting, but in fact were so excited from the visit that they took time to send a note of personal thanks. What the Monday card person does is simply mail a short, hand-written message to the visitor. Everyone can sign it, if you like. The message says something like "Thanks for coming and assembling with us. We truly love you and your family and would like you to consider attending with us again." Then add a personal message like "Your children are so beautiful, and I hope we all become close Christian friends." This card is mailed out the Monday following the prospects' visit on Sunday. You can use your new attendance book to get the name and address needed. The preacher can send a card also if he desires, but don't substitute the member's hand-written message for a typed generic message from the preacher. Visitors will expect that, so do the unexpected.

Members Who Will Call. You should have the most people in this category. Explain to the membership that each week they will be

responsible for calling only two people and inviting them to worship. The invitation should be loving and never judgmental. If the caller knows something about the prospect, like family members, where they work etc., you can use this to interact pleasantly with them before going on to explain who you are and why you are calling.

Here is how the calling part of the program works. For example, let's say you get 5 volunteers who are willing to call the prospects. Upon examination of your list, you notice that 10 names have been given. With this simple demonstration of 5 to 10, here is how you would organize the list.

This list should be rotated each week and then handed out to those who volunteered to call. Instruct the volunteers to make the calls on either Thursday, Friday or Saturday. The reason for this is because people tend to devise excuses if you call too early in the week. The end-of-the-week call limits their excuse-planning time. The contacts on this list will receive an invitation from two different members each week. This should last for a total of three weeks. If there has been no response from the prospect or they are feeling harassed, remove them and add another. ✞

Week One	Volunteered to Call	Prospects	Phone#
	Bob Smith	Tom Brown	449-6892
		Jim Walker	449-3872
	Andy Rove	George Kee	449-2243
		Tom Andrews	449-6372
	Jane Wilson	Sharon Fox	343-2998
		Jean Box	449-1119

(Chapter six of John-Mark Wilson's study book and work-guide, ***The Secret to Waking Up the Pew Potatoes.)***

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Editor's Note:

We would like to continue with the account brother Grimm wrote concerning the existence of Christians in many places throughout the centuries following the establishment of the church in Jerusalem in AD 33. Because true Christians have always been in the minority, their history has often been ignored, even while many were dying martyrs' deaths as "heretics" at the hands of religious people.

Persecution and Endurance

Dr. Hans Grimm

The story continues...

Friedrich Reiser came to Tabor about 1431 and visited all the scattered Christians in Bohemia and Moravia and got in contact with the Waldenses of the adjacent Austrian districts. The Taborites, who were inclined toward the New Testament, esteemed the daring evangelist very highly for to them he was the connection with the long chain of congregations believing the teachings of the apostles, a "bishop of God's grace in the midst of the Roman church corrupted by the gifts of Constantine." He was one of the fellow elders of the Taborite congregation in Landscron, and was in position to attend the church council in the entourage of secular delegates sent at the request of the frightened emperor in 1433. He was able to attend this council in its discussion concerning a reform of church and state.

A plan of reformation conceived by him at this time, which was printed and circulated, contained definitions as they were to be found current 93 years later in the peasant parliament at Heilbrenn. When the skillful diplomacy of the Roman Catholic Curia succeeded in breaking up the front of the Hussites who at first maintained unity, and the majority of the Bohemian-Moravian delegates declared themselves satisfied with the granting of the

chalice for the laity, just then civil war broke out in the Czech districts.

Reiser had warned in vain against trying to protect churches of Christ with the sword. The Taborites, incensed at the betrayal of the common cause, began the two-front war against those who had capitulated in their own camp and against the crusaders on the borders. They were annihilated near Lipan in 1434 as a military force by the combined forces of their opponents, and about the middle of the century they vanished as a religious party also.

Now Reiser tried to bring his mission to a close by creating a place of refuge for the gospel in this Bohemia that was still reeking from the blood of civil war, for, as he thought, the compromise of the majority of the Hussites made at least a space in Central Europe that did not stand directly under the jurisdiction of the popes, a region in which a certain mutual tolerance necessarily would have to arise through the coexistence of two different forms of worship and faith.

Fugitives from Picardy had already found shelter near Tabor, also Waldenses from Upper and Lower Austria. Reiser now wished to set about bringing the message to the hard oppressed brothers and sisters of the Upper Rhine and in Brandenburg so that no hindrances might stand against their entrance into Bohemia. But he was recognized in Strasbourg by the guards of the Inquisition and burned at the stake along with one of the deaconesses of the church, Anna Barbara von Weiler. Even in death he professed: "God is love. Only he who abides in love abides in God."

As he had foreseen, the work of the Lord in Bohemia and Moravia was to develop in a most gratifying way during the next hundred years. The former military captain of the Taborites, Peter von Cheltsehitz, long before the outbreak of the civil war, through conversations with Reiser had come to the conviction that Christ had also given us a law in answer to a question of a lawyer in Matthew 22:35-40 with these words, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."*

In his letter to the Galatians Paul repeated the same law (6:2): *"Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."* In his spiritually significant book, **The Net of Faith,** Reiser had developed out of this "law of Christ" the entire position of a New Testament church, coming in detail to the same conclusions of the primitive believers in Syria, Armenia, Kurdistan, Spain, Bulgaria, Albania, Bosnia,

Italy and France.

Reiser broke off his connections with his former comrades at arms and retired to his estate near Senftenberg. After the final destruction of Tabor by the humbled, restrained Hussites the remains of those stern scripturalistic Taborites and Picards came to this refuge near Senftenberg in 1452 where under Reiser's influence and the spiritual guidance of Gregory, a nephew of the Hussite bishop of Prague, they were developed into a separate congregation. The persecutions that shortly set in strengthened them in their separation from the Hussite church and in their efforts to form a purely New Testament church. In 1467 in the Forest of Lhotka near Reichnau, there was held a decisive discussion of some sixty seekers after God of all New Testament tendencies among whom were former Taborites, people from the district of Peter von Cheltschitz, former Waldenses, and Christians of the ancient faith.

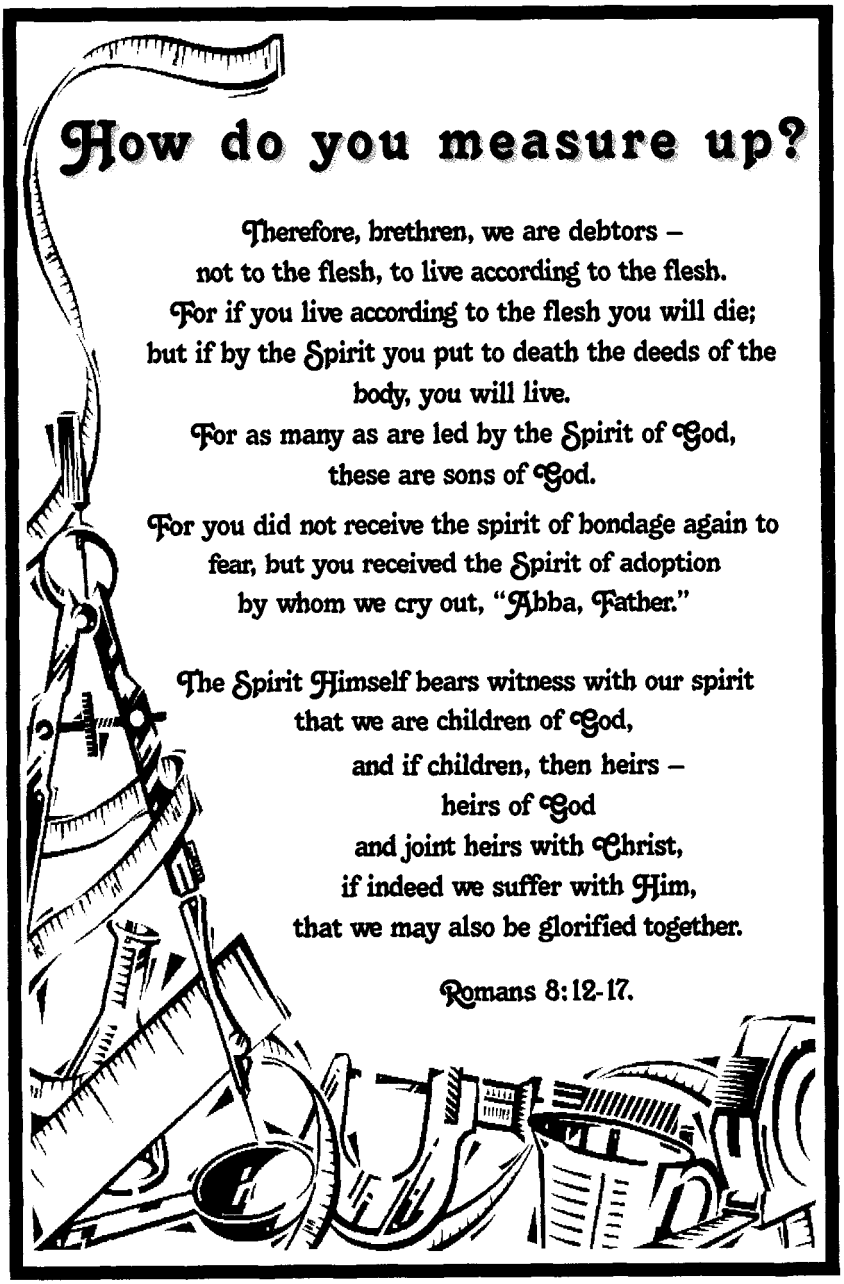
In ardent prayers they besought God's blessings upon the new brotherhood that was being formed, and they chose three from their midst to be elders, commissioned to conform this developing church to the apostolic pattern.

The three chosen were separated for the duty conferred upon them by the laying on of hands: a former Catholic priest and two Waldenses elders. The assembly resolved to stand by the Savior's way of nonviolence, therefore through constant appeal to the New Testament they rejected service in war, the death sentence, and the office of secular judgeship, and the giving of an oath in court.

In regard to the possession of earthly goods they decreed that the apostolic principle should prevail that those possessing goods should so live as though they possessed nothing and that they should be conscious of the fact that they were only stewards of possessions that had been entrusted to them through God's grace. The work of the elders lay first of all in the spiritual condition of the congregation and in church discipline. The Lutheran researcher, von Zetschwitz, later had to acknowledge, even against his will: "The impartial historian will be obliged to acknowledge that since the times of the apostolic churches no community of churches has in gradually approaching manner performed similar results in actually pure and noble life as the Bohemian brethren." ✝

Excerpt from Tradition and History of the Early Churches of Christ in Central Europe by Dr. Hans Grimm, translated by Dr. H.L. Schug, and printed by Firm Foundation, P.O. Box 210876, Bedford, Texas, 76095-7876, USA.

Note: The Bibliography will be given at the conclusion of the series of articles. Editor.



How do you measure up?

Therefore, brethren, we are debtors –
not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.
For if you live according to the flesh you will die;
but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.
For as many as are led by the Spirit of God,
these are sons of God.

For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption
by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father."

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit
that we are children of God,
and if children, then heirs –
heirs of God
and joint heirs with Christ,
if indeed we suffer with Him,
that we may also be glorified together.

Romans 8:12-17.

007 in Any Town

Mike Benson

A Frustrated Sovereign

SCRIPTURE DESCRIBES IT as attempted guerilla warfare...

Ben-hadad tried to carry out a series of assaults against the citizens of Israel (2 Kings 6:8). "Tried" is the operative word, because every time the king of Syria sent out a war party in ambush, he found enemy troops inexplicably guarding the camp he had intended to capture (vs. 8-10).



The inspired text says this happened *"not just once or twice"* (NKJV), but that Ben-hadad's plans were foiled repeatedly. The monarch came to the conclusion that there was either (a) a spy, or at the very least, (b) an intelligence leak within his own war cabinet. Somebody was obviously "feeding" Jehoram — his Israelite counterpart — information. So Ben-hadad summoned his military counsel together in an effort to expose the traitor (vs. 11,12). He inquired of them, *"Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?"* (v. 11b).

As it turned out, no one from Syria had disclosed the king's plans. The informant was actually Elisha — the prophet from Israel — in HIS Majesty's secret service! Like a character from a James Bond 007 movie, the man of God had a divine "surveillance camera" (cf. Proverbs 5:21; 15:3; Zechariah 4:10) in the king's bedchamber and was therefore privy to his most secret conversations (v. 12). Every strategy concocted within Ben-hadad's heart was revealed by God to Elisha who, in turn, conveyed the plans to the Israelite king in Samaria.

Armed with this new information, Ben-hadad turned his attention

away from attacking a nation to capturing an individual (v. 13). Think of a deck of 52 playing cards, not with photographs of various high-ranking Iraqi officials, but with Elisha's face on every single card! The Syrian ruler sent a large force to surround the city of Dothan under the cover of darkness (a village about 12 Roman miles north of Samaria — (cf. Genesis 37:17) and apprehend Elisha (vs. 14,15).

A fretful servant

Early the next morning, Elisha's servant awakened and discovered the Syrians entrenched about the city (v. 15). He seemed to have known that the soldiers had come for his lord and cried out in fear, *"Alas, my master! What shall we do?"* (cf. Exodus 14:10-14).

Like American forces searching for Saddam Hussein, the army had located the great prophet and was under orders to take him prisoner (v. 14). Elisha knew that a very great danger existed, but he also knew something of the militia arrayed in his defense. He calmly told his servant, *"Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them"* (v. 16).

That may have sounded reassuring, but at that particular moment, no allied troops could be seen in the vicinity. Elisha then prayed that his servant's eyes might be opened (v. 17). The prophet's prayer was immediately answered, and suddenly his aide beheld a massive, heavenly detachment of horses and chariots of fire (v. 17b; cf. Exodus 3:2; Numbers 22:22-31)! This was a vision of deliverance!!

A faithful saint

Consider for a moment the servant's pitiful cry, *"Alas...what shall we do?"* You can almost hear the alarm in his voice, can't you? He could only see an imminent attack; he could only see the problem. Brethren, we must strenuously guard against a similar mentality in the church today. Despondency sees only the multitude amassed against us, and fails to consider the Divine host that is marshaled on our behalf. The Bible says, *"...If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31b). Do we really believe that?

Our problem is in the *perception* of the physical instead of the *sight* of the spiritual. It's not that we *lack* sufficient *funds,* or *manpower,* or *space,* but **vision!** We need to stop thinking about what *we can't do* and get a glimpse of what **God can do** through us (Philippians 4:13)! The New Testament teaches, *"While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are **not** seen..."* (2 Corinthians 4:18a; emphasis mine, mb). *"For we walk by faith, **not** by sight"* (2 Corinthians 5:7; emphasis mine, mb).

Years ago, a grade-school class was told to go home and count the stars in the sky as part of their science lesson. Students came back with wildly dissimilar answers. One child said, "A couple of hundred." Another said, "Ten thousand. " Another offered, "One million." Finally, the teacher asked one little boy who had not yet spoken up, "How many stars did you count?" The boy replied, "Three." "Only three?!" the teacher exclaimed. "How did you see only three?" He said, "I guess we just have a small backyard."

Beloved, let me humbly but forcefully suggest that we need a big backyard today; we need a great vision — one that is worthy of the "King of kings and Lord of lords". I'm not thinking in terms of some miraculous manifestation (cf. 1 Corinthians 13:8-10; Ephesians 4:11-13); I'm talking about faith and focus.

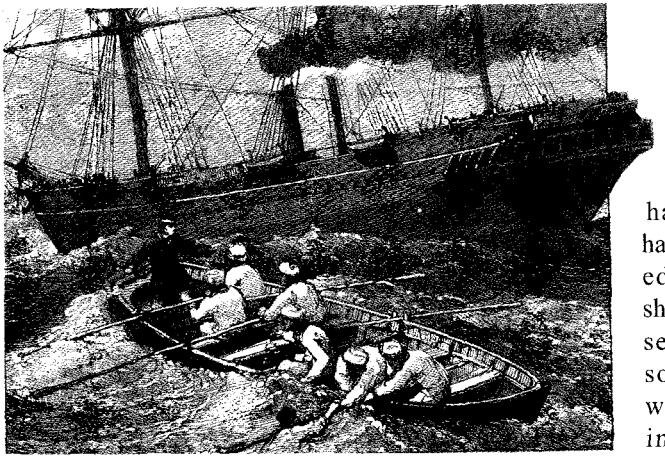
The eye of faith sees **Divine presence,** whereas the eye of fear sees **desperate problems.** God is on our side and He's never lost a single battle! Amen?! Once we come to terms with that truth, we'll stop wringing our hands in doubt and start using them in fervent and devoted service (Hebrews 12:2). ✞

Mike Benson works with the Oak Hill Church of Christ in Evansville, Indiana, USA. This article appeared on their web site, which can be accessed at the following internet address: www.oakhill-coc.org.

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.
The road to success is not straight.
There is a curve called Failure,
A loop called Confusion,
Speed bumps called Friends,
Red lights called Enemies,
Caution lights called Family.
You will have flats called Jobs.
But if you have a spare called Determination,
An engine called Perseverance,
Insurance called Faith,
A drive called Jesus,
You can make it on to a place called Success.

— Gingergrams



On April 15, 1912 an event occurred which moved the world. Man had boasted of having constructed a transport ship to travel the seas which was so safe that it would be almost impossible to

THE SALVATION OF OUR OWN DEPENDS ON US

Jesús Rodríguez

***"But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel"* (1 Timothy 5:8).**

sink. We all know the history of the Titanic, the ship which sank in the northern seas after colliding with an iceberg. Around 2,000 lives were lost, owing to the over-confidence and sense of security on the part of the builders, the crew, and the passengers in their belief that the ship was impossible to sink.

That night there were both acts of heroism and truly sad situations. But what made the most profound impression upon the consciences and minds of people of that time were the acts of nobility and love. Most of the survivors on that fatal night were children and mothers. The fathers gave their lives in order to save those they deeply loved. They did everything possible

to save those who still had life and opportunity before them. Through the sacrifice of their own lives, they gave their wives and children a second chance at living.

Let's think about those fathers who opted to lose their own lives in order to save those they loved. How would they have felt in making that decision? With what peace and contentment would they have died, knowing that their own survived? Surely even in death there was bitter-sweet satisfaction in knowing that they were not dying in vain.

God wants each father and mother to be responsible for their children in every way — physically, emotionally, and especially spiritually. He wants us to dedicate our time to ensuring that no glacier or iceberg strikes the ship of our lives to cause our children to fall overboard and perish. It is not the church that is responsible for teaching our children the way of the fear of Jehovah; it is *our* responsibility.

Looking further afield, in some cases we are blind to the fact that we have some very near to us, some who have been with us in the ship since infancy, who are at the point of falling into the sea. I am speaking of our own family members, parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, cousins, and other relatives. We must dedicate ourselves to seeking out and teaching those who are on board with us, while there is still time.

What can we do for our own?

* Educate them in the love and fear of God from childhood (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15)
* Correct them with patience and love (Proverbs 23:13,14).
* Set an example of good works (Titus 2:6,7; 1 Timothy 4:12).
* Put the things of God first (2 Timothy 1:5; 1 Timothy 5:4; 3:4,5,12).

God has given a great treasure of souls into our hands. We must respond to Him for the confidence He has placed in us by not being like the unfaithful servant who did not use the only talent that the Lord had turned over to him (Matthew 25:14-30). Let us not allow the torrents of darkness to envelope our loved ones. Let us make sure that those of our household are always safe in the ship that will carry them to eternal life. ✞

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Growing Up

Stan Mitchell

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me'" (Matthew16:24).

When I was a little boy, my mom cooked meals on a wood stove, and an outhouse was commonplace for friends and neighbors. So, am I an old-timer recalling faded memories of days long gone? No. But the hiss of a pressure lamp did fill my evenings. Are these the musings of an octogenarian? Not exactly. I remember the pop-pop of a flywheel John Deere tractor, however. I remember the sound and smell of a gas pump, hand-cranked, filling to glass dial, then pouring into the tank of our vehicle.

Am I a longstanding member of the AARP? Well, no, I'm not. I'm 44 years old, elderly to some teens, I imagine, but not nearly old enough to remember the scenes I just described. So how is it possible that I grew up with them?

Well, I am a missionary kid. I grew up in a country several decades behind the United States. Tough life? Bitter memories of deprivations? Traumatic years of readjustment to the United States?

Not on your life! My experiences include standing on the edge of the Victoria Falls and seeing one of the great wonders of creation. I grew up hearing the African people sing hymns with matchless harmony. I grew up learning that the best — the absolute-without-comparison-mission method was to take to



another culture the Word of God in all of its purity. When I listened to locals complain of having their religion filtered through a Roman, British, or American point of view, I wondered at the beauty, the simplicity, of presenting Zimbabweans with a *"thus sayeth the Lord"* for every action, every doctrine.

I watched as the church of the New Testament unfolded in a far country. I observed the grace of an incomparable God transform communities. I saw men turn from the terror of serving demons and witch doctors to serve the *"living and true God"* (1 Thessalonians 1:9). I watched as they gladly surrendered family and position, and served God completely. My only culture shock upon returning to the United States was to see so many brethren, encumbered with materialism and worldly sophistication, abandon their responsibility to serve God with all of their hearts. I had never known great blocks of Christians to not sing at worship. I had never seen children of God dismiss Bible Study for other, much lesser pursuits. And I wonder, still, was it I who was so wrong?

My upbringing as a missionary kid was a privilege. I have just one question for you: If you were told that the way to save your child's soul was to leave for another country, worship in an infant church, and draw water from a nearby well, would you save your child's soul? ✞

Stan Mitchell now preaches the Gospel in Borger, Texas, USA.

What a Passion for Evangelism Does

1. It makes us appreciate the fact of our own salvation even more than we formerly did.
2. It helps to impress us with the urgency of the tasks of saving the souls of men, because we are constantly reminded of our mission to share the Gospel with every creature.
3. We actually become burdened with the thought of lost people around us and begin praying about them.
4. It opens our eyes to the power of the Gospel as we see people responding to the invitation of Jesus.
5. It reminds us of the power of God's word to change lives.
6. It builds a new fire or helps to rekindle an old flame in the eyes of Christians.
7. Most of all, it glorifies the Father who is in Heaven. He sees His people at their best, working for the salvation of souls. — **Bob Crass**

We All Need Somebody

Joe W. Nichols

The above caption is a familiar saying to each of us. *We all need somebody!*

Children depend upon parents for their needs. God planned the home to where each member would need the other members (Ephesians 6:1-4). When one member fails to fulfill his part, the home begins to disintegrate and fall apart.

Each church member needs the church, and the church needs each church member (1 Corinthians 12). To be out of fellowship with the church is to be out of fellowship with the Lord (1 John 1:5-7). We need the church, Christ's body, for through the church we receive the benefits of the head, Christ (Ephesians 3:14-20).

Our personal work visits are almost without exception to people who need someone. So many people are sick, lonely, and broken-hearted; others are fighting a losing battle with sin as erring children of God; many are drowning in the pollution of sin, not knowing the way of Truth. Our visit is a serious visit; we are dealing with souls. We should take time to comfort or show genuine concern. Why? Because we are dealing with people who need us, and we are there to give what Christ (the Head) has entrusted to us (Hebrews 10:24).

Through personal work, people are able to receive the "touch of the Master's hand." Jesus reached out during His earthly ministry to touch the little children (Matthew 19:13), the sick, the leper, the broken-hearted, and the dead (Luke 9:2). Today, He continues to reach out through His body, the church. Christ is reaching out through you and me to accomplish His will.

Somebody needs us! How are we extending the "touch of the Master's hand"? It is a serious business, brethren! We all need to give this some thought; pray about it; be as serious as we possibly can be about the Father's business.

We are promised that God will not forget our labors. *"For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister"* (Hebrews 6:10). ✞

Joe W. Nichols works with the Central Church of Christ in Bastrop, Louisiana, USA.



to Become a Christian?

Jerry Jenkins

A frequently asked question in today's world is, "How much does it cost?" We are living in a price-conscious society.

Value of "things" is normally determined by age, duration, or manufacturer. Value can also be determined by time and effort involved. It costs to become a physician, a musician, an athlete, or numerous other things. Generally speaking, one can get anything or become almost anything if he or she is willing to pay the price.

Jesus was keenly aware of cost. He never left the impression that the Christian walk was a Sunday afternoon stroll. *"Whosoever will come after me, let him **deny** himself, and **take up his cross,** and **follow me"*** (Mark 8:34).

To be a Christian involves **abnegation**. The expression, "Let him deny himself," does not mean that disciples of Christ are to **disdain all forms of materialism.** Even after Jesus had called Matthew and he had left all to follow Jesus,

the Scriptures affirm that he still owned his own home. *"And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them"* (Luke 5:29).

Neither is "self denial" **the joining of a monastic order.** The followers of Jesus were energetic, active, people-oriented workers. There is a place for frequent devotion and prayer, but the harvest is ready and there is no time to sit in idleness.

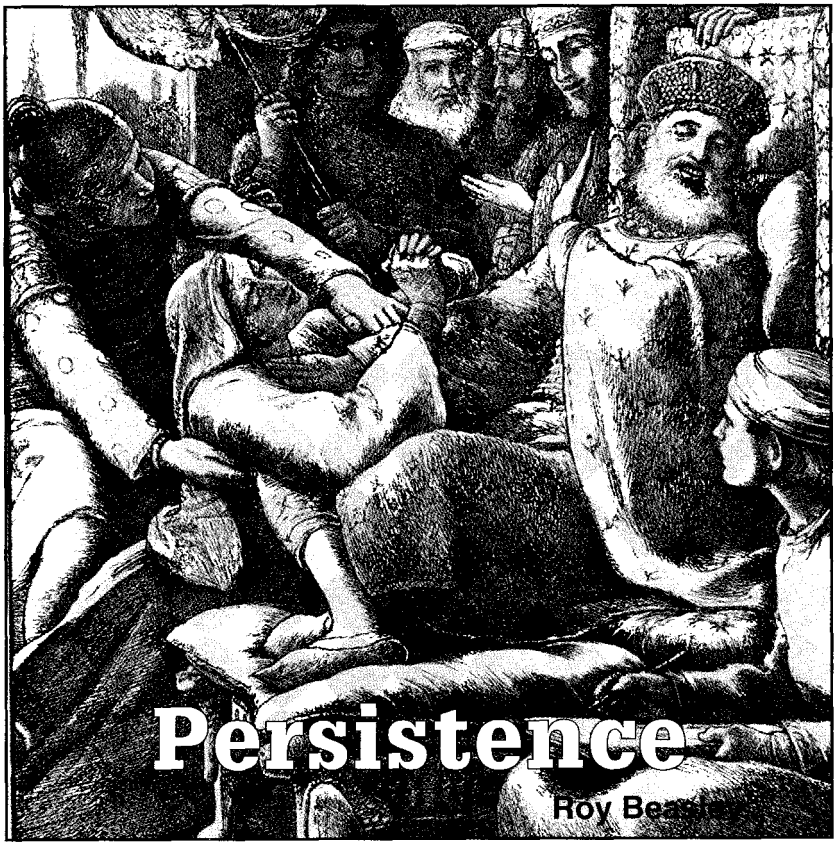
The denial of which Christ spoke involves **renunciation.** Some assert that this refers to a denying of some kind of food, some pleasure, or some comfort. Though the disciple has to learn to say "no" to many of the strongest cravings of his earthly nature, the "cross" we are to take up requires far more than denial of these physical comforts. It is a symbol for duty which is to be performed daily, at any cost, even that of the most painful death. To **deny *self*** means the complete abnegation of one's own life, and of following Him both in teaching and example.

To genuinely follow Christ involves dedication. Though it is true that each individual faces trials and personal burdens, and in this sense has his cross to bear, the lifting of the cross here means to *follow* the will of the Father, and the resulting *suffering constitutes the cross.* Jesus said, *"And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him"* (John 8:29). The world's opposition typically does not involve physical suffering, but sometimes family rejection and work-place shunning can be extremely painful.

Finally, the cost of following Jesus involves **imitation.** Our Lord commanded, *"Follow Me"*. This necessitates adopting Christ's manner of living in words, attitudes, and actions. To follow in His footsteps involves prayer, accepting people for who they are, and seeking in them the highest good. It involves regular attendance to worship (Luke 4:16), and a burning desire to disburse God's words to others.

The advertisement in today's world is, "Come as you are!" The intimation is that God is so eager to claim another soul for His own that He will come down to our standard and will gladly accept us without any change on our part. **This is not what He says in His word.** Unless we are willing to count the cost and to pay the price *He* asks, Jesus says that *we cannot be His disciples.* **We must come up out of the world to meet His standard!** ✝

Jerry Jenkins is the preacher for the Roebuck Parkway congregation in Birmingham, Alabama, USA.



Persistence

Roy Beasley

Who is an "over-achiever"? Studies have been made and books have been written on the subject. What makes on over-achiever different from the ordinary? What is the secret of their success? The answer may be surprising. One common trait was discovered. Not a high IQ. Not good fortune. Not special advantage. It was *persistence.*

When Winston Churchill became old and feeble, he was invited to speak at a graduation. Against the advice of his friends and family he accepted. When the time came for him to speak, he rose from his seat and walked slowly to the podium. There he stood silent for a long time looking over the audience. His aids became nervous. The audience became restless. Then he spoke. He said: "Never give up. Never give up. Never, never, never." Then he sat down. That perhaps

turned out to be one of the most memorable speeches he ever made. And perhaps it was the best advice that graduating class ever received.

While persistence may appear to be a simple virtue, Jesus stressed its importance. It is essential in every area of life — even in prayer. The Lord taught that we *"ought always to pray and not to faint* (or lose heart)*"* (Luke 18:1). We are to pray and pray, and keep on praying. Don't give up. To illustrate His point, Jesus told two stories. One involved a friend who came during the middle of the night requesting bread. Although the man was in the bed and was annoyed at this late-hour visit, he responded to the persistent knocking. The point is that if a friend will answer such an appeal, how much more will our Father in heaven respond to us (Luke 11:5-8)? Jesus concluded by saying in verse 9, *"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."*

The second illustration was that of a widow who kept coming before an unjust judge to make her request.

"...There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, Neither regarded man; And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto He, saying, avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while; but afterward he said within himself, though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet Because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me.

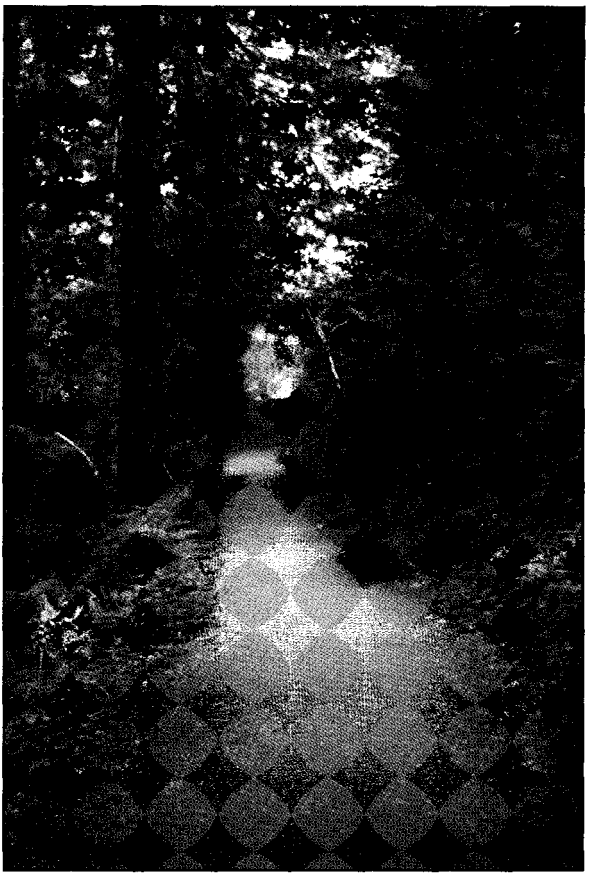
"And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, Though he bear long with them. I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:1-8).

The point is that if this cruel judge would respond to the persistence of a poor widow, how much more quickly will God listen to the prayers of His saints?

Jesus also taught persistence in faithfulness and preparedness. He described a *"faithful and wise servant"* as one who continues to do his duties in the absence of his master. He said, *"Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods"* (Matthew 24:46,47).

Yes, persistence pays. It becomes our greatest strength when it is anchored in God. As Winston Churchill said: "Never give up — never, never, never." ✝

Roy Beasley is the Executive Director of Restoration Radio Network in Nashville, Tennessee, USA.



A Perfect World

Wayne Barrier

The present world is far from perfect. We sometimes dream of a perfect world, a place free from the troubles we face every day. Great effort is made to make this world a better place. Many people are overcome by the never-ending failure of life in this world to reach a state of perfection.

We are created by God, who is perfect (Matthew 5:48), and are promised that we can be made perfect (Colossians 1:28), and can go to a new and perfect world (Revelation 21:1) when our short time in this present world is over. Our life here is simply a time to prepare for eternal life.

What a wonderful way to live! We can live our life on earth and enjoy the greatest gifts possible, provided by God to His children (1 Corinthians 13:13) and look forward to heaven. We can put our faith in God, obey His word and

enjoy the hope of eternal life.

Consider Romans 5:1-5 which states, *"Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*

"And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance, and perseverance, character and character hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

We enjoy the gift of love. God's love is incomparable (John 3:16) to any other. **His love is perfect** and is the rule of life for His children (Matthew 22:34-40). Christians succeed based on the principle and law of love. It is not necessary to have the things often associated with success in this world — power, wealth, intelligence, possessions, etc.

God's plan is perfect. His children enjoy all spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3). These blessings are available, if one is in Christ. God has given Christ all authority (Matthew 28:20; Ephesians 1:22,23; Hebrews 1:1). As His followers, we enjoy the privilege to pray and receive help from God (Matthew 7:7-12). We can know that God will bless us with His hand of providence (Romans 8:28), care and keeping. We can have wisdom (James 1:5) and be strengthened within (Ephesians 3:10) as we live in this world. When our time is finished here, we are ready for heaven. Heaven is perfect — a place with no sin, fear, disappointment, evil, sickness, death or sorrow.

Are you preparing for life in heaven, the perfect world? Jesus went to prepare a home for all of us there (John 14:1-4). We can follow Him if we are prepared (Mark 8:34, John 12:26). ✞

Wayne Barrier works with the World Evangelism team and lives in Florence, Alabama, USA.

Little deeds of kindness
Little words of love,
Help to make Earth happy
Like the Heaven above.

Julia Fletcher Carney

Signs on the Road of Life

Owen Cosgrove



Can we imagine what traveling would be like without road signs to help us along the way? The way to life as described in the Bible has many road signs that we need to understand and heed.

Obey All Traffic Signs — State Law. God does not make laws for us to pick and choose and obey selectively. To break one is to be guilty of all of them. Obey the Lord's commandments. This is *Heaven's* law.

Stop. Those who run the spiritual stop signs of life risk hurting themselves and others. When the Lord says stop, we'd better not run the stop signs. Even when we are tempted to do wrong, **stop!** "Stop" does not mean slow down. It means ***stop.***

Slow. We get too impatient in life. Watch your speed. You will make wiser decisions and improve your chance of survival if you just slow down when time and circumstances call for it.

Do Not Enter. There are some areas of life where Christians must not be. Do not even start into these areas. Leave them alone.

Wrong Way. This sign means that you are headed toward a deadly encounter if you do not make some changes quickly.

Turn Back. If you are going the wrong way, turn back before it is too late.

Keep Right. The twenty-one epistles of the New Testament were written to Christians, urging them to be faithful to Christ. *Get right* by obeying the Gospel, and *keep right* by being faithful in Christ's service.

One Way. There is one way that leads to life eternal, and it is not

a two-way street. Wise travelers get in that way and go with the flow that leads to Heaven. As the song says, "No turning back, no turning back."

Yield. The Christian learns to yield. First, he yields to God because God has the right of way. Then he learns to yield to others in matters of judgment so that the church can work together as a mighty team. We can all have our say, but we cannot all have our way. People who do not learn to yield cause many fender benders and smash-ups in life. We will still arrive at our destination in plenty of time, and our trip will be much more pleasant for us and others, when we learn to yield.

Yes, life has many traffic signs. Good Christians, like good drivers, respect and obey the rules. ✝

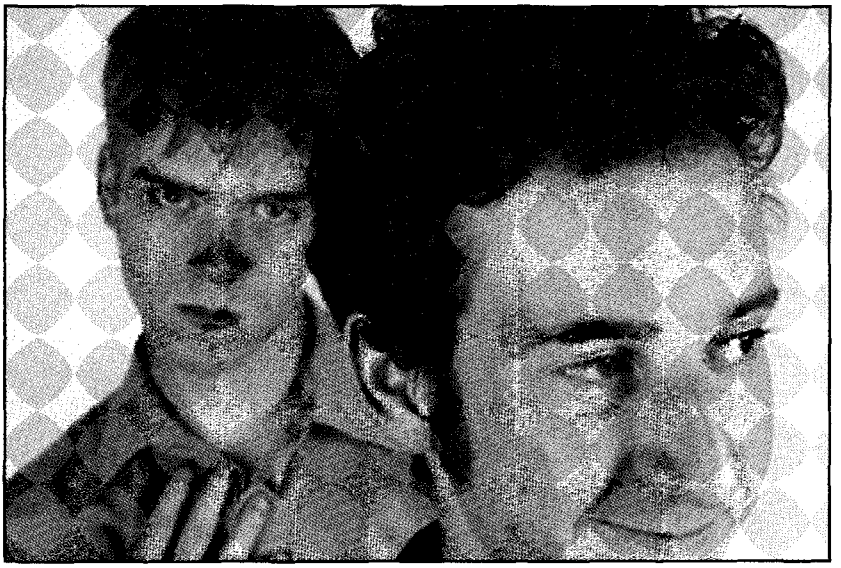
Owen Cosgrove preaches for the Northside Church of Christ in Waxahachie, Texas, USA.

Conscience

One of the things which separates men from animals is our conscience. What is conscience? It is that faculty which decides upon the moral quality of one's actions and motives. If I speak to you of conscience, do you have happy feelings or do you feel ill at ease? I want to show you how conscience is one of your most valuable possessions; and it will help you to have a happy life. It is true that it hurts us when we go against what we know is right, but the opposite is also true.

Our conscience will give us peace and an inner contentment when we are doing what we know is right. In Hebrews 13:18 we read, *"Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly."*

Let me challenge you to study God's word every day, learn what is really right, and then renounce everything in your life that places a strain on your conscience. You'll be a lot happier. — Unknown



Flee, Fight, and Follow

Francis David

We live in a world which is going through some very difficult times. We are surrounded by all kinds of evil and temptations. What do we read every day in the newspapers and watch every day on TV? Murders, rapes, all sorts of crimes, terrorism, hijackings, kidnappings, immorality, divorces, corruptions. The list is endless! Immorality is projected on TV as normal living styles. Sometimes evil is considered good. It reminds us of the words of the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament: *"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and sweet for bitter"* (Isaiah 5:20).

We need to protect the younger generation from these evil forces. It is sad that some parents do not take their responsibility seriously in rearing their children. Sometimes, we see children who are left to do just what they wish. The Bible tells us in Ephesians 5:15,16 *"See then that*

you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time because the days are evil."

Our young people are facing a difficult situation. In the Bible we read of a young man who was an evangelist and an associate of the apostle Paul. This young man, Timothy, was a good person. Yet, the apostle Paul had to give him some advice. In 1 Timothy 6:3,4, Paul told him, *"If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to doctrine which accords with godliness, he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions, useless wrangling of men of corrupt minds."* He went on to say, *"But you, O man of God, **flee** these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. **Fight** the good fight of faith"* (vs. 11,12).

There are so many attractions all around us which tempt us to sin. How do we deal with these situations? The Bible tells us that we must flee these things. *"Abstain from every form of evil"* (1 Thessalonians 5:22). This verse is very small, but it has a great message. If we sincerely follow God's instructions, whether we are young or old, we will be greatly benefited.

In 1 Corinthians 6:18, Paul says, *"Flee sexual immorality..."* There is so much smut and rubbish being shown on the TV. Parents, do you check what your children are watching? Many times we see kids left alone without any guidance, watching all kinds of immorality on TV. In the Old Testament, we read that the Israelites were told by God to teach their children constantly in the way of the Lord. *"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up"* (Deuteronomy 6:6,7).

We live in an age where parents seldom find time to teach and admonish their kids. But for their own protection and security we need to teach our boys and girls to **flee** from evil and to **fight** the good fight of faith.

There are some questionable places that should be "off limits" for our children. Do you keep a check on where your children go and the type of people with whom they associate? The Bible says, *"Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits"* (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Abstain from all kinds/forms of evil. I believe this is very good advice from the Scriptures. There may be evil in our talk; check what you say! The Bible warns, *"Let no*

corrupt communication or words come out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification" (Ephesians 4:29).

Young men and women, you need to check how you dress! Is your dress modest? How is your public appearance? Is it modest? Parents, do you keep a check on your children's dress, especially your daughters? If the popular fashion is immodest and revealing, do not copy the popular fashion! We must fight and resist the devil.

James says, *"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you"* (James 4:7). Do you have enough courage to resist the devil? If not, ask God for help. He will help you in your fight. The devil is trying to trap you. His trap is strong and he is quick; he never gives up, especially if you are trying to live for God. The apostle Peter wrote, *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, be steadfast in the faith..."* (1 Peter 5:8,9). We cannot resist Satans' onslaughts unless we are alert, because he is devious and deceitful.

What is the easiest way to **fight** or **flee** the devil? Follow Jesus! Jesus said, *"Whoever desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and **follow** me"* (Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23).

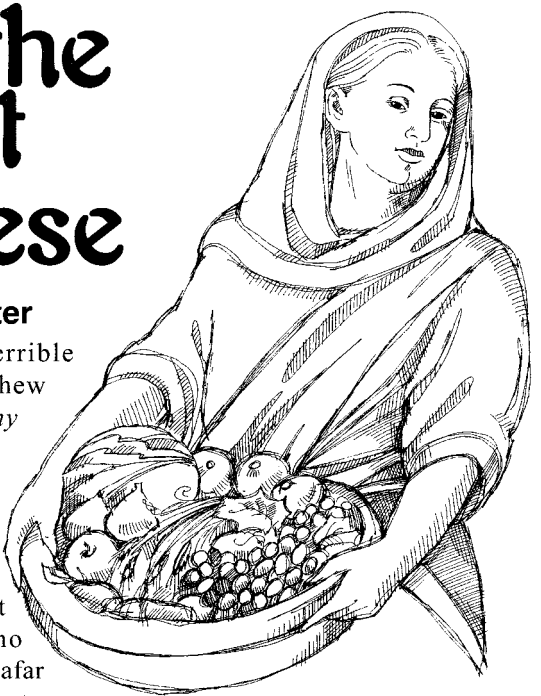
Jesus is the captain of our salvation. With His help, we can fight the battle. But to fight this battle, we need to equip ourselves with the armour God provides. Paul said in Ephesians 6:10-13, *"Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."*

If you are a Christian, then you must walk daily with Him and never hesitate to **flee** from temptation. You must **fight** the good fight of faith and live a good Christian life. You must **follow** Jesus, the author and perfector of our faith.

My friend, if you are not a Christian, you can also become a follower of Jesus. You must believe in Jesus, confess Him as the Son of God before men, repent of your old, sinful life, and be baptized (immersed in water) for the forgiveness of your sins. When you become a Christian, you will have to **flee, fight** and **follow.** ✞

Francis David is a Gospel preacher and editor of the Hindi *Bible Teacher* magazine in New Delhi, India.

Unto the Least of These



Jane McWhorter

In depicting that terrible scene on Calvary, Matthew commented: *"And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto Him"* (Matthew 27:55).

Have you ever thought about those women who helplessly watched from afar as Christ suffered the torturous death on the cross? Two of the ones mentioned had sons the same age as our Lord. Can you imagine the mental agony of these followers and the utter frustrations of their desires to ease the suffering of the One to whom they had ministered? Have you ever wondered what these women had done for Christ during His ministry? They probably prepared meals, offered water, and provided lodging for a weary, homeless body. The Scriptures state that they had followed Him from Galilee, the northern region, which was a long way from Jerusalem. The road was difficult, especially for a woman. The weather was still cold at this time of the year. Would we have been so devoted if we had lived at that time?

No longer are we given the opportunity to minister to the needs of Christ's physical body, but an earlier passage in Matthew offers the same opportunity. Whenever we feed and clothe the needy, offer hospitality, provide companionship and help for those in trouble, we are doing it for Him. *"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the* ***least of these*** *my brethren,* ***ye***

have done it unto me" (Matthew 25:40).

Our Lord has no hands but our hands. There are so many around us who are in spiritual and emotional need of a Christian friend. Each day dozens of opportunities present themselves, but we are usually too busy with "things" that really aren't important at all. If Christ were present in a physical body, I wonder how quickly we would drop all and run to Him. But we can't. The **only** way we can minister to Him is by serving others. It matters not that the recipients seem ungrateful. We are doing it for **Him**.

In all likelihood, there was not a woman in that crowd who would not gladly have exchanged her life for that of her master, but none of them could. We are told how to save our spiritual lives: *"...he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it"* (Matthew 10:39). We find our true lives by becoming so absorbed in living for Him (and serving others) that we lose our lives to the world.

The next time there is an occasion to serve others, try to visualize what an opportunity you have. *"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these..."* ✞

Jane McWhorter is a Christian writer living in Fayette, Alabama. USA.

Easing Burdens

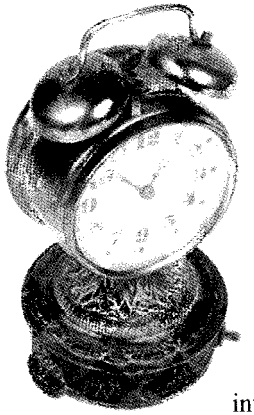
Take the "sun" out of sunshine,
Put it in a sunny smile.
It will cheer a lonely person
And make living more worthwhile.

Take a hand that needs a helping,
Lead it on a happier road.
It will ease those heavy burdens
By your sharing half the load.

Take your heart that's filled with love,
Gladly give it all away.
It will overflow to others
And keep rushing back each day.

Take the time to speak to neighbors,
A "hello" to show you care.
You may need a cup of sugar,
For you, no cupboard will be bare.

—Kathryn Wiesenhoefer



Life is short and we waste so much of it in pursuit of the dollar. We tell ourselves that we must "keep up" with those around us. We must live in a nice house, drive an expensive automobile, wear stylish name-brand clothes, be a member of *the* club or take part in recreation that is expensive, and eat out as often as we can because our friends and neighbors are doing it.

The Gift of Time

Dale Grissom

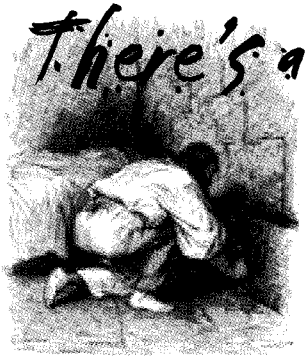
Many parents will spend their last dollar, even go into debt, to buy the things their children desire, but will neglect to give the very best gift they could possibly give: the gift of their time. Because of the guilt they feel about the lack of time spent with their children, parents may try to make it up to them by buying all kinds of toys and things. As the children get older, the gifts get bigger and more expensive — cars or trucks. All the while the child is growing up with the idea that this is the way things are supposed to be, when in fact this way of life is void of true commitment — commitment in service to God and to our families.

Husbands and wives need to spend time together developing a true love for each other, and then spend time developing a healthy relationship with their children. Frequently, however, both parents work outside the home. They allow themselves to become so busy that they do not take time for each other, and they find that when they get home from work they are so mentally and physically exhausted that they are in no condition to cope with the day-to-day responsibilities of caring for the children. Communication breaks down as a result, and the family grows apart. The marriage may end in divorce — one parent becomes responsible for raising the children — and everyone involved suffers.

Parents, spend time with your children — schedule it, if necessary — and use this time to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4). Fathers, re-establish your God-given responsibility as head of the family. Lovingly discipline your children, and teach them respect for their parents, other adults, and their peers. Determine to spend time as a family, building the God-centered home He would have us to enjoy. ✞

Dale Grissom is full-time personal worker with the church in Dexter, Missouri, USA.

There's a Hole in the Wall



Joe Barnett

There's trouble in the land. No wide-awake person will deny that! These upheavals have caused many parents to express apprehension concerning the future of their children. That's understandable! When our children graduate from high school and leave home, many of them also leave the church. Suddenly they are exposed to an environment hostile to Christ, and even to the basic principles of morality. If a young person is not equipped to handle this, he is in grave trouble.

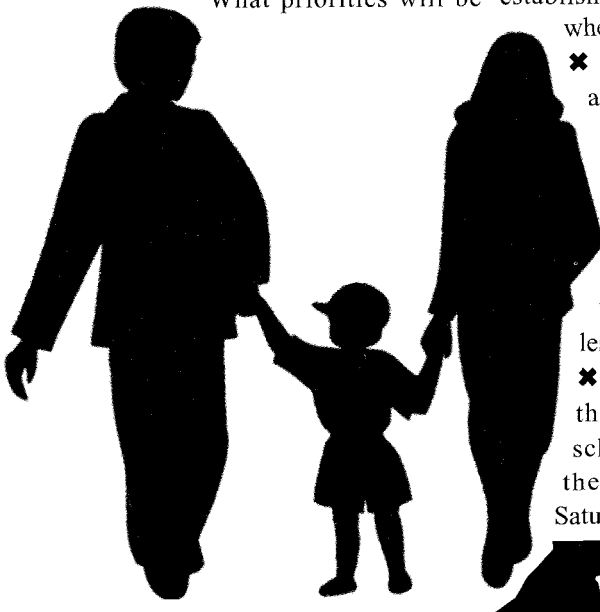
Unfortunately, at a time when families should be doing everything in their power to strengthen their spiritual defenses and intensifying their fight against Satan, many are permitting the safe-guard to be torn down. *Neglect of Sunday evening services, absence from prayer meeting, failure to encourage children to become totally involved in church-centered activities* are some of the more obvious evidences of this foolish neglect.

Parents need to get their priorities straight. Those of us who preach seldom have the courage to remind weeping parents of the problem. But when dads and moms begin crying over what has happened to their kids, they could be reminded of the days when they chose camping instead of church, weekend trips and night recreation instead of Sunday night inspiration.

It takes only one hole in the fence to let the sheep out! It's amazing how prolific some people are at inventing excuses to rationalize their habitual neglect. I would much prefer a person to be honest enough to say "I just don't want to put spiritual priorities first" than to forever blame job, health, grandma, or baby for short-comings. What advantage is there in covering up the real facts in the case?

Put first things first! Let nothing interfere with regular church attendance. Be sure your children are deeply involved in youth programs. Then, after they've gone from home with that good training, you can do what you want with your own life. But I have a feeling that, by that time, you'll be thrilled with putting spiritual things first and will make it a lifetime policy. ✞

Joe Barnett is with Cactus Drive Church of Christ, Levelland, Texas, USA.



What Are the Priorities at Your House?

Wendell Winkler

What priorities will be established in your children when . . .

✖ you are early for a ball game, but late for worship?

✖ you check on their homework regularly, but never check on their Bible class lessons?

✖ you won't let them stay up late on school nights, but let them stay up late on Saturday night?

✖ you know the names of all their school teachers, but do not know who is teaching their Bible classes, or what they are studying?

✖ you will serve as room mother or volunteer at school, but will not help with classes, activities, or programs which involve spiritual matters?

✖ you will not go on vacation during school days, but go on vacation during VBS, a lectureship, or a gospel meeting?

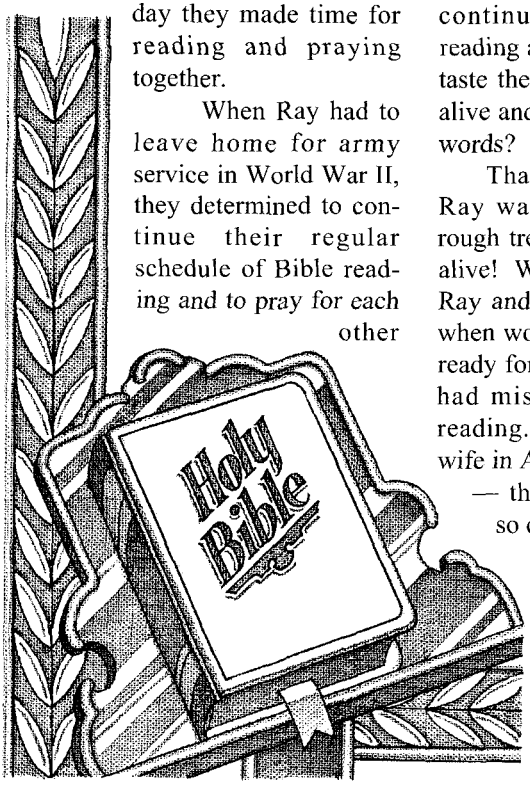
Yes, with such situations prevailing, what priorities are being established in the hearts of your children?

Wendell Winkler is a preacher of the Gospel living in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, USA.

Unbelievable!

An Alabama girl, Katherine Laubenthal, and a Michigan boy, Ray Harshmann, went to Washington to work for Uncle Sam. They met at the 14th Street Church, began dating, and fell in love. On their wedding night they started family worship by reading from the Bible and praying together. Then every day they made time for reading and praying together.

When Ray had to leave home for army service in World War II, they determined to continue their regular schedule of Bible reading and to pray for each other every day. In this way they would have the joy of knowing that, though miles apart, each would be reading the same passage of Holy Writ.



"Missing in action" was the word from Europe to Kathy after the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium. Grieved, hoping against hope, she continued her daily devotional, reading an agreed chapter. Dare she taste the thought that Ray might be alive and might be reading the same words?

Thanks to a kind providence, Ray was a prisoner, undergoing rough treatment and a thin diet, but alive! When two years elapsed, and Ray and Kathy kissed, they found, when worship time came, they were ready for the same chapter! Neither had missed a day in prayer and reading. A husband in Europe, a wife in America, a Father in Heaven — those three, miles apart, yet so close together!

Now, half a century later, Ray and Kathy still love each other, and still read and pray together.

Hugo McCord was for many years a professor of Bible at Oklahoma Christian University, but is now deceased.



Why is it that the man who invests all your money is called a broker?



Advertisement: Dog for sale: eats anything and is fond of children.



Another advertisement: Man wanted to work in dynamite factory. Must be willing to travel.



Police in Los Angeles had good luck with a robbery suspect who just couldn't control himself during a lineup. When detectives asked each man in the lineup to repeat the words, "Give me all your money or I'll shoot," the man shouted, "That's not what I said!"

If lawyers are disbarred and clergymen defrocked, doesn't it follow that electricians can be delighted, musicians denoted, cowboys deranged, models deposed, tree surgeons debarked, and dry cleaners depressed?



Rufus: Boy, am I lucky!
Ralph: How's that?
Rufus: Well, yesterday I took an IQ test and the results came back negative!



That old "50-50-90 rule" certainly seems to be right. Anytime you have a 50-50 chance of getting something right, there's a 90% probability you'll get it wrong.



When my 3-year-old son opened the birthday gift from his grandmother, he discovered a water pistol. He squealed with delight and headed for the nearest sink. I was not so pleased. I turned to Mom and said, "I'm surprised at you. Don't you remember how we used to drive you nearly crazy with water guns?"

Mom grinned, then replied, "Yes."

Sally is always late. It's understandable, though. It runs in her family. Her ancestors arrived on the Juneflower.



"I am" is reportedly the shortest sentence in the English language. Could it be that "I do" is the longest sentence?



Old Uncle Ben may be right. He says that a clear conscience is usually the sign of a bad memory.



Have you ever wondered why "abbreviation" is such a long word?



Some of the best advice I ever heard was, "Borrow money from pessimists — they don't expect it back!"



An unfortunate fact of life: 99% of lawyers give the rest a bad name.



If you think nobody cares for you, try missing a couple of payments.

A very scientific study has concluded that there are three kinds of people: those who can count and those who can't.



A passenger in a taxi leaned over to ask the driver a question and tapped him on the shoulder. The driver screamed, lost control of the cab, nearly hit a bus, drove up over the curb, and stopped just inches from a large plate glass window. For a few moments everything was silent in the cab, and then the still shaking driver said, "I'm sorry but you scared the daylights out of me."

The frightened passenger apologized to the driver and said he didn't realize a mere tap on the shoulder could frighten him so much.

The driver replied, "No, no, I'm sorry. It's entirely my fault. Today is my first day driving a cab. I've been driving a hearse for the last 25 years."



Living on earth is expensive, but it does include a free trip around the sun every year.



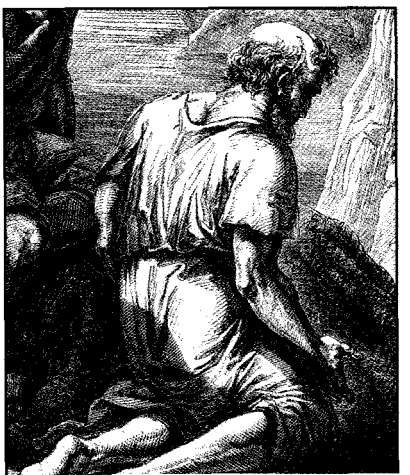
Birthdays are good for you; the more you have, the longer you live!

Who Am I?

Can you identify me? Read each clue and think carefully. If you guess my name after the first clue, give yourself a score of 100 points. If you know who I am only after the fifth clue, your score is 60, etc.

When you are sure of my identity, look up the passages of scripture following each clue to verify the facts from God's word.

1. **100** My hometown was the city of Bethsaida, and I was a fisherman by trade (John 1:44; Matthew 4:18).
2. **90** I was a disciple of John the baptist. He pointed out the Messiah to me, saying, "Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:35).
3. **80** I, along with another of John's disciples, asked Jesus, "Rabbi, where are You staying?" and we spent the rest of the day with Him (John 1:38,39).
4. **70** I told my brother, "We have found the Messiah," (John 1:41), and then He called both of us to follow Him (Matthew 4:18).
5. **60** As one of the disciples of Jesus, I heard Him preach throughout Israel, and I saw the many miracles He performed.
6. **50** On one occasion a large crowd had gathered and was hungry after staying with Him for some time. When Jesus asked where they might buy food for the crowd, I said, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two small fishes." From that small lunch, Jesus fed the five thousand (John 6:1-14).



See answer on inside back cover.

7. **40** Along with the other disciples, I was sent out on the "limited commission", to alert the towns and villages of Israel that Jesus would be coming to preach (Matthew 10).
8. **30** I was not one of the special three to see the transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1).
9. **20** With the others, I deserted Him in Gethsemane (Matthew 26:56).
10. **10** I preached with my brother, Peter, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

My Score _____



In the great faith chapter in the Bible, one of the examples is that of Abel. We can learn several important les-sons from his life:

He Is Dead and Yet He Speaks

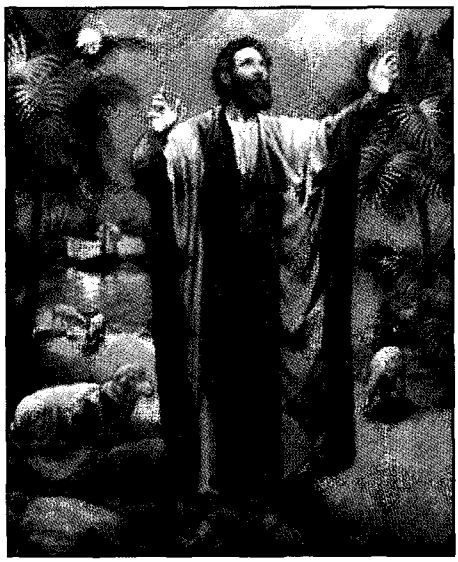
Max Patterson

1. Abel did what he did by faith. Hebrews 11:4 states, *"by faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain."* Abel listened to God. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). The result was, *"And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering"* (Genesis 4:4). Our worship must be in faith.
2. By obeying God, Abel obtained witness that he was righteous. God commended him for doing what was right. God bore witness by the fact that He accepted Abel's offering.
3. God testified of his gifts. This means that God spoke well of his offering — God approved. One of the meanings of "testifying" is to give a good report.
4. *"And by it he being dead yet speaks."* Although Abel is long gone, he still speaks through the record of his faith. He speaks to us today. What does his record say to us? It says that God approves of our behavior when it harmonizes with His Word. What are the words and examples we will leave to future generations? With what actions do we want to speak, long after we are dead?

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote the following lines in "A Psalm of Life," which seem appropriate just here:

Lives of great men still remind us
We can make our lives sublime;
And departing leave behind us,
Footprints in the sands of time. ✞

Max Patterson is a gospel preacher living in Bolivar, Missouri, USA.



Abraham

Hans J. Dederscheck

The design of the Bible is to reveal the divine plan of redemption in Jesus Christ. An understanding of the Bible requires a knowledge of its first book, Genesis. One of the great personalities of Genesis is a unique man, Abraham. The messianic line, from Adam's son, Seth, and continuing through Noah's son, Shem, assumed a national character through the calling of Abraham who became the head of the messianic nation. A nation, separated from all other nations and provided with divine institutions was required to prepare the way for, and to bring forth, the promised Messiah, the *"seed of the woman"*.

In Abraham we have the preeminent man of faith. *"Just as Abraham 'believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the nations shall be blessed.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham"* (Galatians 3:6-9).

It is by faith that we appropriate all the benefits of divine grace. By faith the atoning work of the Messiah becomes efficacious. By faith the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, and faith is reckoned for righteousness. In Abraham is exemplified this faith by which we are justified in Christ. Of all the great souls of the Old Testament, it is Abraham whom Paul uses in setting forth this great doctrine of justification by faith.

"...That the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. ... But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:14, 25-29; Romans 4:1-25).

The call of Abraham shows four things:

(1) he had to leave his native land;
(2) God promised him another land;
(3) he would receive a great seed;
(4) in him all nations would be blessed (through Christ).

Following God's requirements and believing in His promises required a lot of faith on Abraham's part. Since God spoke to him, though, this was enough for the patriarch.

Abraham indeed left his home without knowing where he would go. God showed him, step by step, and he arrived at Canaan according to the Lord's promises. God made a covenant (a pact) with Abraham. He promised a powerful seed, and Abraham believed God. Through Isaac the way would be made for God to keep the messianic promise.

Abraham, who believed God, was justified. This is the way people need to come close to Christ today to be justified:

"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went" (Hebrews 11:8).

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

Therefore, *"cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For you have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul"* (Hebrews 10:35-39). ✝

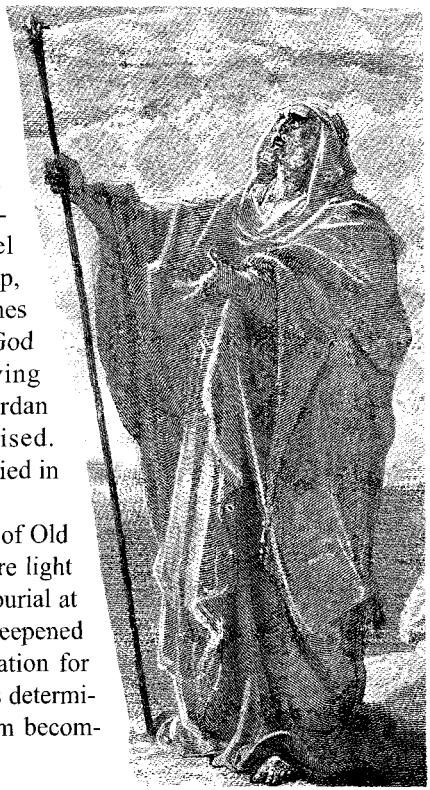
Hans J. Dederscheck is an evangelist in the country of Austria.

Moses — Died Too Soon, Grave Unmarked

Jack Harriman

Moses was one of the greatest men the world has ever known, and he was Israel's greatest leader. Even God said so! In view of this, his premature death and unique burial are strange indeed (Deuteronomy 28-34).

Moses died just outside of the Promised Land because he failed to give God credit for providing water from a rock (Numbers 20). He had spoken and acted as if he had brought the water by his own power.



Now, just before Israel's entrance into her inheritance, God instructed Moses to go apart into the mountain overlooking the Promised Land. It would seem that this was done so that Moses could get a mental picture of the land and of Israel possessing it. Through his leadership, the people had been saved many times during the past forty years. Now, God wanted Moses to face death knowing they would finally pass over the Jordan and receive all that He had promised. Through this preview, Moses could died in peace.

When the New Testament speaks of Old Testament events, it usually sheds more light on matters, but in the case of Moses' burial at the hands of angels, the mystery is deepened (Jude 6-9). The most logical explanation for the unmarked grave seems to be God's determination to prevent the burial place from becoming a religious shrine.

Today we can learn five important lessons from these last days in Moses' life.

Lesson Number One

Before you die, speak clearly and earnestly to your people about being faithful to God after you are gone. Moses did! Too many go to their grave leaving too much unsaid.

Lesson Number Two

Willingly hand your work over to another before you are gone. Moses did! Even though there was not another man on earth who could have done the work that Moses did, the time came to hand it over to someone else. This is especially applicable to preachers, elders, and other church leaders.

Lesson Number Three

Don't get careless in your last years. Moses did! Thirty-eight years he avoided such sin, but got careless just two years short of the Promised Land.

Lesson Number Four

Face death without murmur and complaint. Moses did! Neither his body nor his mind was worn out. He had not even lived as long as his father before him, but there is no hint that he tried to bargain with God for more time.

Lesson Number Five

Go up to the mountain top and look at the Promised Land. Moses did! He saw its beauty and bountifulness, and he got a mental picture of Israel in it. Of course, I mean heaven. Paul and John were both provided a brief visit there and what they saw inspired them to endure to the end (2 Corinthians 12; Revelation 4). The Word of God provides information about that place, information which enables us to build a mental image of heaven and ourselves in it. ✞

Jack Harriman is a gospel preacher living in Fayetteville, Arkansas, USA.

Caleb, a Man of God

Ken Tyler

Caleb was a remarkable man. Among a nation of disobedience he remained true to God. Listen to this pronouncement of the Lord, *"Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land, which I sware to give unto their fathers, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh; he shall see it, and to him will I give the land that he hath trodden upon, and to his children, because he hath wholly followed the Lord"* (Deuteronomy 1:35,36). Verse 38 points out that righteous Joshua would also enter the promised land.

Why was Caleb pleasing to God? It was *"...because he...wholly followed the Lord"* (Deuteronomy 1:36). Does this statement describe your life? It's not good enough to say there is just too much sin and temptation. Caleb stood among a nation and world of wickedness. It's bad enough to live in a world of wickedness, but even the people of God in Caleb's day were evil. Yet, Caleb still *"wholly followed the Lord."* But he refused to lose sight of the most important thing in the world, that is, to please God.

Today, are you wholly following the Lord? Listen to these statements from Psalm 119: *"Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart"* (verse 2); *"With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments"* (verse 10); *"...I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart"* (verse 69). Acceptance of God means the surrendering of our all to Him.

In the New Covenant, Jesus explained, *"Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it"* (Mark 8:34,35). No matter what compromises the world around us may be making, or how others are rationalizing regarding disobedience to God, we cannot please Him unless we are willing to count the cost and give up everything. Only then can He give back to us above and beyond all that we have laid on the line for Him.

Caleb has set a great example before us. If followed, it will lead to the promised land — heaven. May we all take heed to the example of this great man of God. Truly, we need more Calebs today. ✞

Ken Tyler preaches for the church of Christ in Arab, Alabama, USA.

When Should Children Be Baptized?

David R. Pharr

Children who are brought up under the influence of godly parents usually express the desire to be baptized at an early age. Parents are rightly concerned about giving their children proper guidance. They want to avoid anything that might appear to hinder the child's obedience to God, but on the other hand, they do not want the child to act prematurely.

A young person should not be baptized **(1)** until he or she has understanding and conviction about sin, **(2)** until he or she understands fundamental facts about God's plan of redemption, **(3)** and until he or she is ready to accept the responsibilities of the Christian life.

Understanding the plan of salvation is more than merely being able to recite that baptism is *"for the remission of sins"* (Acts 2:38). There must be some understanding of grace, atonement, the Deity of Christ, and His death on our behalf. Certainly these things must be taught to young people on their level, but a person is not ready for baptism without a degree of knowledge and appreciation of such matters. In some cases we may have explained baptism to those who lack a sufficient foundation in other matters to really grasp it.

Baptism is not *the end.* It is *the beginning.* The commitment to Christian discipleship is not an easy commitment. Parents and teachers should be careful to explain this. Of course, it is vital that parents and teachers teach by the influence of their own consecrated lives. Some parents want their children to be baptized, but they do not seem to want them to attend faithfully. It sometimes appears that some are pleased for their children to be baptized, **but their ongoing influence gives more emphasis to their place in the world than to their place in the church.**

A youth's decision to be baptized should not be based on his or her having reached a certain age. The calendar has nothing to do with it. Neither should one be baptized simply because others have been. Genuine conviction, understanding, faith, and repentance are essential steps into baptism. Faithfulness and purity of life are essential afterwards. We love to see children give their lives to the Lord, but this requires more than just being baptized. ✞

David R. Pharr is the preacher for the Charlotte Avenue congregation in Rock Hill, South Carolina, USA.

Did Jacob See God?

Wayne Jackson

How do we harmonize Jacob's claim that he saw God (Genesis 32:30) with the New Testament statement that no man has seen God at any time (John 1:18)?

First, it must be noted that as to His actual essence, God, our heavenly Father, is a spirit-being (Isaiah 31:3; John 4:24). As a spirit, He does not possess the nature of humanity. A spirit does not consist of flesh and bones (Luke 24:39). When Peter confessed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, the Lord observed that the apostle had not learned that truth from *"flesh and blood,"* but from the *"Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 16:17). It is clear, therefore, that Jehovah is not physical. Contrary to the assertion of some cultists, He is not a man (Hosea 11:9). Thus, as a spirit, God dwells in light unapproachable (1 Timothy 6:16). He is invisible to the eye of humans (John 1:18; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; 1 John 4:20).

While it is true that God cannot be observed as pure spirit-essence, it is also the case that Deity has, on special occasions during the historical period when His redemptive plan was being gradually unfolded, assumed temporary corporeal forms through which He communicated to select individuals. Three "men" visited Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, yet one of them was "Jehovah" who "appeared" to the patriarch (Genesis 18:1). Jacob struggled with a "man" who was really a divine being in temporary human form (Genesis 32:24,30). When Moses requested to see God's "glory", Jehovah suggested that He would make His *"goodness pass before"* the prophet (Exodus 33:18,19). The subsequent context suggests that the Lord's character was revealed to Moses, not the actual essence of Deity (34:5-7).

Too, there are other indirect ways in which God may be seen. His invisible traits (His power and wisdom, for example) are observed in the things which He has created (Romans 1:20). He is seen in the revelation of His Son (John 1:18; 14:9; Colossians 1:15; Hebrews 1:3). He is "seen" representatively in the rich spiritual blessings which He bestows (Matthew 5:5 with John 3:3-5; 3:36).

Passages, therefore, that speak of seeing God, and not seeing God, do not conflict. They simply represent different vantage points. ✞

Wayne Jackson is the editor of *Christian Courier* and is a preacher in Stockton, California, USA.



Who Is The Angel of the Lord?

T. Pierce Brown

The expression, *"The angel of the Lord"* appears in the King James Version of the Old Testament more than 50 times and in the New Testament about a dozen times. Our question is, "Does the expression signify an ordinary angelic being, or does it relate to a divine being — what is called a 'theophany'?"

I do not know that the answer to this question will be of any practical value to us in living the Christian life, and it surely does not need to be known for one to be

saved. However, it is our judgment that any truth revealed in God's Word is of some value to us, even if at any given moment we may not see any value in it.

It seems evident that in Exodus 3:2ff, when the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, that he was the God who said, *"I AM"*. When Jesus said in John 8:24, *"Except ye believe that I am he ye shall die in your sins,"* and when He said in John 8:58, *"Before Abraham was, I am,"* He was affirming that He was Deity. He was God in the flesh — Emmanuel.

In Genesis 21:17, when the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, he said in verse 18, *"I will make of him a great nation."* It is evident that Deity was speaking. When Abraham was offering Isaac on the altar, the angel of the Lord said to him in Genesis 22:15ff that he would make of him a great nation and bless him.

It seems highly probable that since John 1:18 says, *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him,"* and 1 Timothy 6:16 reveals the same truth, that these various appearances of Deity, in the burning bush, in the form of a heavenly or angelic Being, or in the similitude of a man or "the son of man", were actually manifestations of the Second Person of the Godhead, of the One (the Word) who was in the beginning *with* God and who *was* God (John 1:1), who *became flesh* and *dwelt among us.* Jesus Himself said in John 14:9, *"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."* Of course He was not contradicting Himself when He said, *"No man hath seen the Father,"* for He simply meant that He was a manifestation of the Father.

So, since Jesus said in John 8:58, *"Before Abraham was, I AM,"* and since there were many occasions where persons saw *"the angel of the Lord,"* who was then identified in the same passage as "the Lord" or "God" and was worshipped as God, the only logical and scriptural conclusion we can reach is that in such instances the expression "the angel of the Lord" refers to Deity. A study of the passages shows that "the Lord" who was speaking was the one whom we know as Jesus, acting in His role as mediator between God and man.

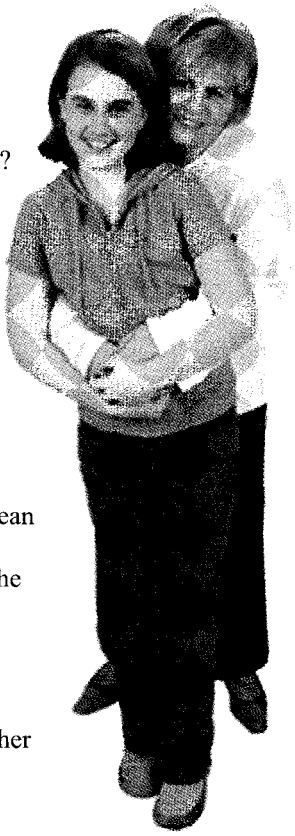
We need to realize, however, that the word "angel" itself simply means messenger or one who is sent, and may refer to a human being, an angelic created being, or to a manifestation of Deity. The context will help us to determine which it is. ✞

T. Pierce Brown lives and preaches in Cookeville, Tennessee, USA.

Virtuous Women Are Needed

Proverbs 31:10-31

E. Claude Gardner



I. Introduction

A. Who is your model?
   1. How do you want to be in the future?
   2. Why not be the "virtuous woman" of Proverbs 31?
      a. Can this passage be read befittingly at your funeral?

B. The Virtuous Woman is priceless — worth more than rubies (v. 10).
   1. A limited number are in the world.
   2. Better women will make better men and boys.
   3. "There is nothing better than a good woman and nothing worse than a mean woman."

C. What are some of the characteristics of the Virtuous Woman?

II. Discussion

A. She is a Worker (vss. 13,27).
   1. Industrious
      a. "Worketh *willingly*" and with "her hands".
      b. Not lazy.
   2. Energetic (vs. 15).
   3. Talented and developed a skill (vss. 19,22).
   4. Helps the poor through her work (vs. 20).
   5. Sells some of the garments she makes (vs. 24).
   6. Hence, she must do more than sleep, watch TV endlessly, read books and magazines, keeping young, and gadabout.

B. She is kind (vs. 26).
   1. She is kind in use of her tongue; gentle; speaks kindly.
   2. She is occupied by her work and is happy and therefore, does not feel embittered at life.

3. She speaks in such a way so as to show respect to her husband as head and of her children as individuals and as human beings.
4. She is not harsh, fault-finding and hyper-critical; she is not quarrelsome and contentious.

C. She is a Good Wife (v. 12).
1. Husband "safely trusts" (v. 11).
2. She will do him *good* all her days (v. 12).
   a. She will support and encourage him in his work, plans and worthy ambitions. She stands behind him.
   b. She will seek to satisfy his needs — physical, spiritual, emotional and sexual.
   c. She will be happy, pleasant and of a good disposition.
3. She will not do him *evil.*
   a. By failing as a housekeeper.
   b. By being unfaithful and disloyal.
   c. By failing to live within the budget.
   d. By ignoring headship; nagging.
   e. By being a poor example and influence on children.
4. She honors her husband (v. 23).
5. Her husband praises her (v. 28).

III. Conclusion

A. These traits make for a worthy woman — a good woman and a happy woman.
B. These characteristics make for happiness in the home.
C. The virtuous woman today is a Christian woman. ✞

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Every *living* thing must be cultivated — tended — or it wastes away from neglect, and dies.

Marriages are living things, and they must be cultivated day by day or they will wither from neglect and eventually die.

Many marriages are like many gardens — full of weeds and briars, a few good things growing poorly in hard ground.

But, ah! the marriage that is tended daily with love and thoughtfulness — *that* nears the perfection of happiness planned first *in the mind of God!* — Betty Burton Choate

Results of Obedience by Faith

CONVERTS	Background	Transition	They Became	May Become
AT PENTECOST Acts 2:1-47	Guilty of Murder Acts 2:36; 3:14-15	Repented, Baptized Acts 2:38-41	The Church, Saved Acts 2:41, 47	Entangled, Overcome 2 Pet. 2:20-22
SAUL OF TARSUS Acts 9, 22, 26	Chief of Sinners 1 Tim. 1:13-15	Were Baptized Acts 22:16	Faithful in Christ 1 Tim. 1:12	Castaway, Rejected 1 Cor. 9:27
THE ROMANS	Servants of Sin Rom. 6:17; 3:23	Were Baptized Rom. 6:3-4	Free from Sin Rom. 6:18	Servants of Sin Rom. 6:17; 14:12
CORINTHIANS Acts 8:18	Unrighteousness 1 Cor. 6:9-11	Were Baptized 1 Cor. 12:13	Sanctified, Saints 1 Cor. 1:2	Fallen Away 1 Cor. 10:12
THE GALATIANS	Bondage, Idolatry Gal. 4:3; 5:1	Were Baptized Gal. 3:27	Heirs with Christ Gal. 3:29	Fallen Away Gal. 5:4; 4:9
THE EPHESIANS	Dead in Sin, Aliens Eph. 2:1, 12	Baptized into Name Acts 19:5	Saved, Reconciled Eph. 2:8, 13-16	Disobedient Eph. 5:5-6

How To Relate Wisely to Others

James 3:13-18

"And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness" v.18.

Wisdom is a life style (v. 13).

"Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life..."

Lack of wisdom causes problems (v. 14-16).

"...disharmony and all other kinds of evil..." (v. 16).

HOW TO RELATE WISELY TO OTHERS (v. 17)

I. If I'm wise, I won't compromise MY INTEGRITY.

"The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure." "The man of integrity walks securely" (Proverbs 10:9).

II. If I'm wise, I won't antagonize YOUR ANGER.

"Wisdom is... peace loving" (v. 17).

"Any fool can start arguments: the wise thing is to stay out of them" (Proverbs 20:3).

"A wise man controls his temper. He knows that anger causes mistakes" (Proverbs 14:29).

III. If I'm wise, I won't minimize YOUR FEELINGS.

"Wisdom is ... considerate" (gentle, courteous).

"Kind words bring life, but cruel words crush your spirit" (Proverbs 15:4).

IV. If I'm wise, I won't criticize YOUR SUGGESTIONS.

"Wisdom is ... submissive" (Greek: "eupeithes"; "open to reason"; "it allows discussion").

"A fool thinks he needs no advice. A wise man listens to others" (Proverbs 12:15).

V. If I'm wise, I won't emphasize YOUR MISTAKES.

"Wisdom is ... full of mercy and good fruit"

"Love forgets mistakes; nagging about them parts the best of friends" (Proverbs 17:9).

VI. If I'm wise, I won't disguise MY WEAKNESSES.

"Wisdom is ... impartial and sincere."

Greek: *adiakritos* and *anypokritos,* straightforward and without hypocrisy.

"You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins" (Proverbs 28:13).

"The secret is Christ, Himself; in Him lie hidden all God's treasures of wisdom..." (Colossians 2:3).

— Joe Hunnicut

Quick Commentary on Crucial Verses

1 Timothy 2:11-14

Let a woman learn in silence with all submission.

And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.

For Adam was formed first, then Eve.

And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression.

In today's world of "correctness" and "*rights*", the Biblical teaching that the woman is to be in subjection to the man, and that women are not to take public leadership roles in the assemblies of the church or in the business of the church is relegated to the dustbin of irrelevancy by most religious leaders. This passage in 1 Timothy and a parallel in 1 Corinthians 14:34,35 are *dismissed as pertaining solely to* the culture of the day. The conclusion is that leadership shouldbe based on desire and capability — not *on gender.*

Historically, how many of the patriarchs were women? How many of the great leaders of Israel were women? How many of Israel's judges and kings were women? How many of the prophets and writers of the Scriptures were women? How many of the apostles were women? How many elders in the church in the first century were women?

How can we know that this male leadership/female submission relationship is not "cultural"? Because God explained by inspiration of the Holy Spirit that *the relationship* goes all the way back to **the order of creation,** and Eve's deception in the fall. **Man is to be the head!**

God's almost entirely exclusive use of men in roles of leadership and women in the role of wife, mother, homemaker and nurturer of the welfare of His people should tell us that these roles are not arbitrarily assigned. Men and women were created and fitted for specific tasks.

Let Us Forget

Clarence DeLoach, Jr.

***"...Forgetting those things which are behind"* (Philippians 3:3).**

Memory is a wonderful asset for anyone. Some can remember by name nearly every person they meet. Some can remember nearly all they read.

The Bible teaches us to remember. The Jews were commanded to remember the Sabbath (Exodus 20). Youth were to remember God (Ecclesiastes 12:1). Peter wrote to stir memory (2 Peter 1:13). The Lord's Supper is an exercise in memory.

But, the Bible also teaches us to forget. The happiest people have learned to forget. Much of Paul's success was due to his ability to forget. What should we forget?

1. Christians should forget past sins. Christ has saved us and God has pardoned every sin of which we have repented. His blood has cleansed and removed the sin. When God forgives, He forgets — and so should we. Let's not doubt His precious promises.

2. Christians should forget their mistakes. All make mistakes, even Christians. If there were no mistakes, there would be no need for erasers on pencils. We can learn and profit from mistakes. Some dwell on a mistake until it destroys them. Mistakes can be stepping stones to great victories. Men of history experienced numerous failures. Henry Ford and Thomas Edison succeeded because of determination and perseverance.

3. Christians should forget the petty quarrels and misunderstandings of life. You have misunderstood others, and you have been misunderstood. Misunderstandings occur in business, personal, and church life. We may be offended by the words or deeds of another. Sometimes the hurt is deeply felt. But, don't harbor hurt feelings, lest they sour and bitter the spirit.

4. Christians should forget their good deeds. The good done yesterday will not suffice for tomorrow. We must not hold our good deeds against God as though He were under contract to save us. Salvation is of grace, not debt. Our giving for good works is a joy, not a reason to boast.

There are things to be remembered and other things to be forgotten. Let us do both wisely. ✝

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The Way of the Righteous and the Wicked

Gary C. Hampton

"Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful" (Psalm 1:1).

There are 150 different Psalms, with 101 being ascribed to specific authors, namely:

1. David, 74
2. Asaph, 12
3. The sons of Korah, 11
4. Solomon, 2
5. Moses, 1
6. Ethan, 1

The other 49 are anonymous. A number of the psalms are written about the righteous and wicked and the contrast between their rewards.

The man who would be blessed by God must fully devote himself to the pursuit of the Almighty and His will. As Leslie G. Thomas wrote, "God alone can bless, and those who would enjoy his blessings must enter into and continue in fellowship with him. This, of course, implies that one's inner motives, desires, yearnings, and thoughts be acceptable to God." The Psalmist, in the very first Psalm, warns of a path which would prevent one from growing to be truly acceptable in the sight of the Lord.

One must first avoid passing by questionable places and being with the people who would go there. The *"ungodly"* are those who have no place for God in their lives or thoughts (Romans 1:18-28). Christians need to remember Paul's warning to *"Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good"* (Romans 12:9). In his first letter to the Thessalonian brethren, he wrote, *"Abstain from every form of evil"* (5:22).

Unfortunately, some go ahead and pass by places they should avoid, so the Psalmist went on to

warn against loitering in the presence of that which is bad. "Sinners" are those who cross over the lines which denote the limits and miss the mark. Those who do not exercise their ability to discern between right and wrong discover that their senses are dulled from lack of use, and they become sluggish (Hebrews 5:11-14; 6:11,12). One is reminded of Peter on the night of the Lord's trial. His great temptation, which finally led to denying the Lord three times, could be said to be the result of standing by the fire warming his hands with sinners, instead of staying close to the Lord's side, or with the other disciples.

Ultimately, those who ignore the Psalmist's admonition to not walk by or loiter in the presence of sin will end up sitting down with those who mock God and sacred things. Their lives will be corrupted, and they will fall away from the wonderful blessings they have found in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:33; Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26,27).

The righteous man avoids this course and spends his days reading and studying God's law. After all, God's Word serves to light an appropriate spiritual path for our lives. By seeking to understand it, one can be approved of God, because he is completely prepared to perform every good work and answer the crucial questions of others seeking the path of salvation (Psalm 119:97-100,105; 2 Timothy 2:15, 3:16,17; 1 Peter 3:15). The singer assured his readers that God will bless such righteous ones by causing them to be rooted like a tree beside water. Further, they will produce fruit to God's glory, be like an evergreen, and prosper in their works (Ephesians 4:14,15; John 15:8; Psalm 34:6-8; Matthew 19:29). Joseph is one of the greatest examples of God's ability to make His people prosper even in the most difficult of circumstances.

In contrast, the wicked, or those who choose to live according to their own will, are like the dry, worthless chaff which the wind blows away. They will not withstand the test of judgment. This will include some who believe they are actively seeking God, as well as those unwilling to exert themselves in the Master's service (Matthew 7:21-28; 25:24-30).

God takes approving notice of the way in which the righteous conduct their lives. *"For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister"* (Hebrews 6:10). ✞

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"My Heart Is Fixed, O God"

Maxie B. Boren

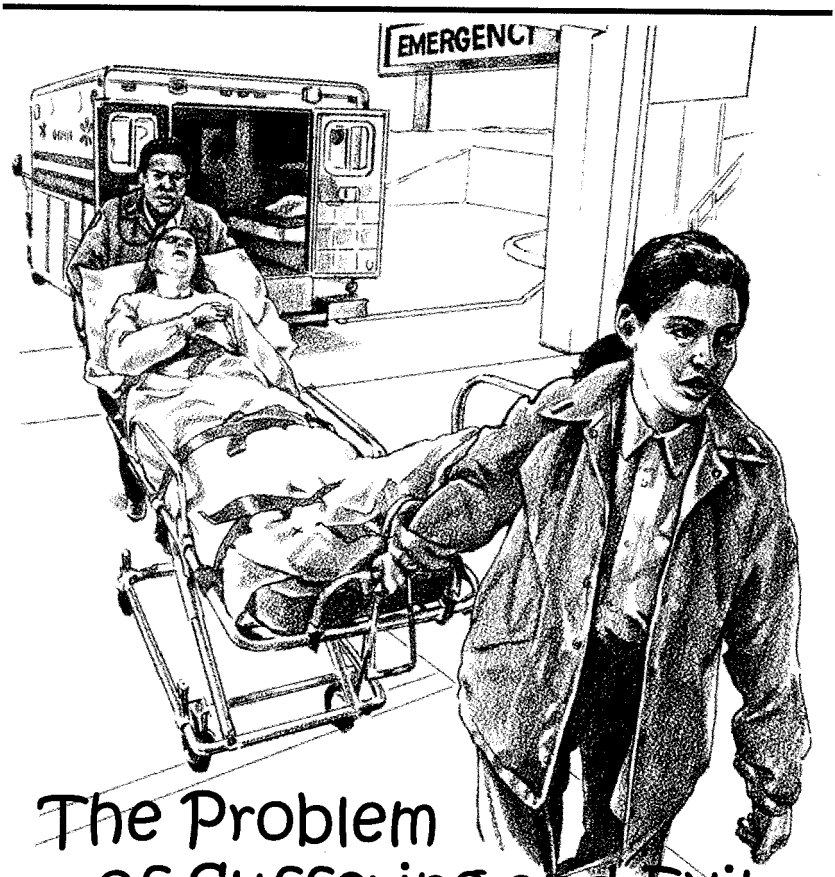
"My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed: I will sing and give praise" (Psalm 57:7).

In Psalm 57:7, David penned these prayerful thoughts to Jehovah... *"My heart is fixed, O God."* What does the word rendered "fixed" in the KJV mean? What was David expressing? Most all the other translations, such as the NKJV, NASV, NRSV, NIV, and NEB render it "steadfast". The CEV translates it "faithful". Brother Roy Deaver, in a lecture he gave on this section of the Psalms, lists "confident and certain" as sort of synonyms or alternate definitions of "fixed".

In the context, David is praising God, concluding the Psalm in verse 11 with these words, *"Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; let thy glory be above all the earth."* That seems to sum up the whole tenor of the thoughts expressed in this particular Psalm. Indeed, the psalmist had a fixation on God and His greatness, affirming that his own heart was fixed on Him. Undoubtedly, he had resolved to be steadfast in his devotion to the Creator, certain and confident as to the direction and goal he himself was taking while living on earth. This is in keeping with what we read from Solomon's pen. *"The whole of man is to reverence God and keep His commandments"* (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

What about you, friend? How do you feel about God? Is your heart fixed on Him? Is He the object of your spiritual affection? Are you devoted and dedicated to Him, steadfast and faithful? I hope every Christian can address God in prayer and sincerely say the same thing David did in the long ago, *"My heart is fixed, O God."* ✞

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The Problem of Suffering and Evil

George Akpabli

Some of the most pressing questions of our time are, "Why do innocent people suffer? Why are babies born deformed? Why is a promising life snuffed out as it is on the rise? Why are there wars during which innocent people are killed, millions forced to flee their homes and become refugees? Why are there natural catastrophes like earthquakes and fires during which people are burned beyond recovery? Why are there accidents during which people are maimed for life?"

DEFINING THE ISSUE

The problem for many Christians is this: "How can an all-powerful and loving God permit evil and suffering to exist? Why would God allow His own children to suffer from terrible diseases? Some Christians also ask, "Why do the wicked seem to prosper while the righteous suffer? Why would God allow His faithful servant to beg for food?" Some question God, "Where were You when I was suffering?"

SOME BIBLICAL REFERENCES TO SUFFERING

The prophet Elijah in the house of the widow of Zarephath is one example of a Biblical reference to suffering. In 1 Kings 17:20 Elijah cried out to the LORD and said, *"O LORD my God, have You also brought tragedy on the widow with whom I lodge, by killing her son?"* This heart-wrenching cry was made after the poor widow, who was his benefactor, had lost her only son. The prophet could not understand why.

In Judges 6:13 we have Gideon saying to the angel of God, *"O my Lord, if the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us? And where are all His miracles which our fathers told us about, saying, 'Did not the LORD bring us up from Egypt?' But now the LORD has forsaken us and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites."*

In Job 10:1-3, Job in bitterness of soul asked God, *"Does it seem good to You that You should oppress, that You should despise the work of Your hands, and smile on the counsel of the wicked?"* In effect, God's answer to Job was, "Trust me, I know what I am doing."

As the story continued, in each of these cases, God used the problems that had come by natural means or because of sinful choices to teach important lessons and to bring the sufferer into a stronger relationship with Him.

THREE TYPES OF EVIL EXISTS

To help us understand the problem of evil, we can classify evil in three ways. The first is physical pain or suffering as a consequence of floods, earthquakes, deformed babies, land slides, accidents, etc. The second is moral evil, murder, greed, strife, lying, etc. The third is eternal hell, a place of punishment for the wicked.

WHY DOES GOD PERMIT PAIN AND SUFFERING?

Before we try to answer this question, some important concepts must be understood.

First of all we must realize that man's knowledge of events is limited. Job 1:6-12 is an example. Often it is difficult for us to grasp *eternal* purposes and design. Joseph was mistreated by his own brothers and suffered

severely for this. The time came when he understood God's purpose and said in Genesis 45:7, *"God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance."*

Secondly, the Bible also tells us in Deuteronomy 29:29, *"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."* Some things are hidden from us. There is no way we can understand them at the time they are happening. There may be no answers even in this entire lifetime. In such cases, our only recourse is to continue to walk by faith, trusting in God to keep His promises to be with us.

The third concept that we must understand is that God has not said that He will take suffering and pain out of our lives, simply because we are Christians. Sometimes we make the mistake of mentally promising ourselves protection and security, in God's name, even though He has never made such commitments. Then when problems come, we may blame God and we may feel that He has failed us. However, He never forsakes us. Pain and suffering are a part of the existence of every living being. And, paradoxically, some of our greatest lessons of faith come through adversity. We can grow in many ways through enduring such trials. When we complain because we misunderstand some of God promises or the seemingly negative things that happen to us, we are limiting our thinking to only this physical life. We become so earthly-minded that we cannot see anything beyond this world in which we live. See James 1:2,3.

Fourthly, we often err in deciding what is good and what is evil. We associate pleasure with what is good and pain with evil. The real evil is sin, not pain or suffering.

Fifthly, our reaction to suffering may be wrong. Our evaluation of suffering and pain may not always be objective. This makes things more difficult. A proper perspective is given in Romans 8:28. *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."* This tells us to look at the whole picture.

UNDERSTANDING GOD IS THE SOLUTION TO THE QUESTION

To properly deal with the problem, another thing we have to understand is the nature of evil (sin) and the concept of a good God and how He works in our lives.

God operates by natural laws: Without natural laws, life on this earth would be impossible (Genesis 8:2), yet a lot of suffering is the result of natural laws in a world feeling the curse of sin (Romans 8:22): earthquakes,

floods, etc. If we violate some of God's natural laws, we suffer the consequences. Fire is necessary for life, but abuse it and it causes pain. Water has the qualities needed to sustain life, but it also has the qualities to drown people. When we enjoy *the benefits* of these laws, no one complains. In Bible times, God used natural disasters to wake up Israel from their sin-slumber. Calamities should sometimes awaken us to the reality that this physical world is a very small part of God's creation, and that it is nothing in comparison to the new heaven and the new earth for which we wait.

God gave us free choice. In our modern world the word "choice" is a loaded one. The ability of man to make free choices often results in consequences of evil and suffering. So why did God not make us so that we cannot choose to sin? Of course, He could have done so, and then there would be no suffering. But without the power of choice we would not be complete human beings, made in His image. How would you like to be married to a talking rubber doll or a big robot (James 1:13-15)?

Much of the world's suffering cannot be blamed on God but on the bad choices of multitudes of humans. Read Proverbs 14:12 and James 1:13.

THE BENEFITS OF SUFFERING AND PAIN

The answer to the problem is that God never intended for this world to be man's eternal dwelling place. In order to prepare men for heaven we need an environment such as ours.

The presence of suffering produces better sons of God. How could Paul have known the power and the sufficiency of God's grace if there had been no suffering in his life (2 Corinthians 12:9)? Man would never have known ultimate good if he had not experienced suffering.

Pain and suffering here should motivate us to avoid eternal hell. THE ONLY REAL EVIL IS TO GO TO HELL. Our present world is just a place of trials and transition to help us learn our need for God, and to enable us to experience the love and compassion of a Father for His children (James 1:2-4). Let us live, despite the pain and the suffering, so as to go to Heaven where there will be no curse of sin, no sorrow, and no helplessness in the face of calamity.

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. ... And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face..." (Revelation 21:4; 22:3,4). ✞

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Miscarriages — Misunderstood and Misrepresented

Brad Harrub, Ph.D.

I was on my way out the door of our office to visit a co-worker and his wife who were at the hospital delivering their second child when the call came. Hearing the voice of a dear friend on the other end of the line, I settled down into one of our secretary's chairs near the front door. In less than three minutes he turned my world upside down, forcing me on a long, hard, emotional roller coaster ride. He started out by telling me he had some good and bad news. The good news was that he and his dear wife had learned they were pregnant a couple of months ago. As I began to congratulate and tease him on what would be his third child, he quickly interrupted me and dropped the bombshell — his wife had just experienced a miscarriage.

As I sat there in free fall, I groped for the right things to say. There I was about to rejoice with a co-worker who was having a baby in the hospital, and yet at the same time my best friend just revealed that he and his wife had lost one. I inquired as to how



he and his wife were doing, and my friend went on with some of the details of the pregnancy. If this had occurred a couple of years earlier, my wife and I would have been on their doorsteps within minutes (literally) — even if all we did was sit on the floor and wipe away tears. But a year earlier we had moved to Montgomery to join the work at Apologetics Press and, as such, our visits were now limited. During my tenure at the hospital, I had watched many couples leave arm-in-arm, with tears blinding their path, as they made their way to the parking lot after realizing a pregnancy had been cut short. But this was the first time it had hit so close to home.

A Disturbing Double Standard

Within the medical community a miscarriage is known as a spontaneous abortion. While no one knows the exact statistics (especially considering that many occur before a woman realizes she is pregnant), it is often suggested that one out of every two or three pregnancies end in miscarriage. Being the father of two young boys, I know firsthand the anxiety parents feel as the technician tries to locate a heartbeat. Those seconds drag by like hours until that familiar rapid whooshing sound is finally detected. For those who have experienced a miscarriage, the silence can be deafening as father and mother strain to hear a heartbeat. Consider those who have struggled for years to have children. They are told the thrilling news that they are pregnant, but before the paint dries on the nursery walls, their dreams are shattered.

Sadly, it occurs to me that we have a double standard of life that is encased within the womb. We dote on expectant mothers, showering them with compliments, praise, and attention. We talk openly about the life they are carrying, and ask if names have been picked out.

But the second that life is cut short, everything changes. The "standard operating procedure" in dealing with those who have experienced a miscarriage is often to leave them alone and give them lots of time and space to heal, the notion being that maybe if we don't make a "big deal" out of it, it will help in the healing process.

But friends, it *is* a big deal! If we are going to argue (rightly) that life begins at conception, then we should not just whitewash individuals that experience this horrendous loss — this loss of a life. When James observed that *"the body apart from the spirit is dead"* (James 2:26), the corollary must also be true in that if the body is living, then the spirit must be present. Since at each stage of its develop-

ment the zygote/embryo/fetus is *living,* it must have had a soul/spirit instilled at conception. No other view is in accord with both the Biblical and scientific evidence.

Consider what emphasis the Bible places on that unborn child. Job, who was undergoing a terrible life crisis, cursed the day he was born when he said: *"Why did I not die from the womb? Why did I not give up the ghost when my mother bore me?"* (Job 3:11).

But tell me, how can something die if it was not alive in the first place? Following that question, we observe in Job 3:13-16 where the patriarch listed several formerly-living but now-dead people with whom he would have had something in common if he had died in utero. Included in the list — along with kings and princes — was the child who experienced a *"hidden untimely birth"* (i.e., a miscarriage).

Job considered the miscarried child to be in the same category as others who once lived but had died. Obviously, the Holy Spirit (Who gave guidance to the author of the book of Job) considered an unborn fetus as much a human being as a king, a prince, or a stillborn infant.

In the Old Testament, even the accidental termination of a pregnancy was a punishable crime. Consider Exodus 21:22 — *"If men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart, and yet no harm follows; he shall be surely fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon him...but if any harm follows, then thou shalt give life for life."* The meaning of the passage is this: If the child was born prematurely as the result of this accident, but *"no harm follows"* (i.e., the child survived), then a fine was to be exacted; however, if *"harm follows"* (i.e., either mother or child died), then the guilty party was to be put to death. Look at it this way. Why would God exact such a severe punishment for the accidental death of an unborn child — if that child were not living?

The Death that Didn't Occur

Sadly, I think in the rush to try and "do the right thing", Christians often wind up doing nothing. We reassure ourselves that since (in many cases) the baby was not held or named then maybe it is not as "real", and thus its death could not hurt as much as if the child had been born and had then died. We contend that, given time, the memory of this "accident" will go away. And so, week after week, Christian couples find themselves alone as they cope with enormous burdens of grief.

Friends, while there may not be an elaborate funeral, no hearse, no

flowers, there has still been a death in the family. How many countless Christian women have gone to sleep feeling the joy and pride of a swelling belly, only to have those feelings ripped out the following day for no apparent reason? While other mothers are pasting up handprints and colored hearts on Mother's Day, many Christian women are simply trying to make it through the day without breaking down.

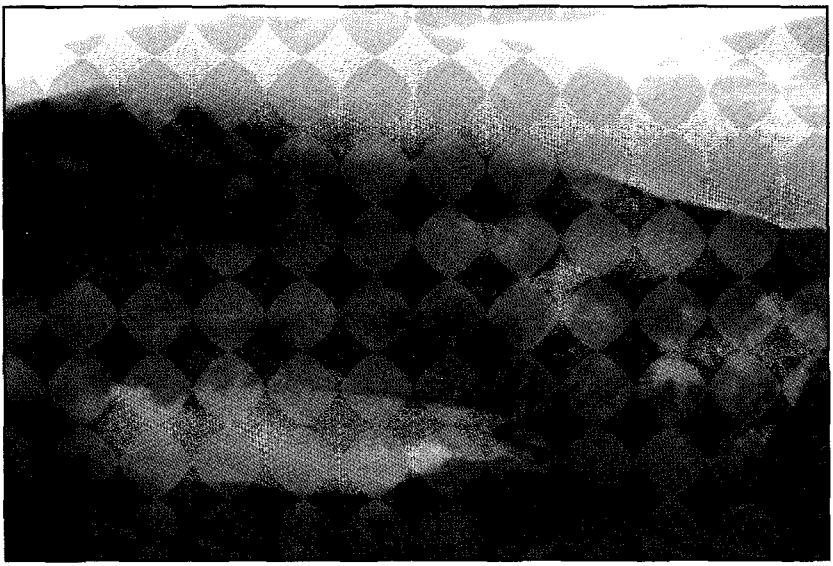
Consider just how traumatic it is to go from having everyone rejoicing with you about your pregnancy to suddenly having no one speak to you. As faithful Christians we need to realize the irony of fighting for unborn life in the case of abortion, but then remaining silent in the cases of miscarriage. Often, instead of getting sympathy and support, those experiencing miscarriages come away feeling that it is somehow their fault — when, in fact, it is not! Why not send them flowers, or a note on Mother's Day, just to let them know that you are thinking of them and praying diligently for them? Paul, in writing to the church in Thessalonica, admonished: *"Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do"* (1 Thessalonians 5:11). By giving a shoulder to cry on, we help our brothers and sisters know that we share in their pain and loss. Jesus stated: *"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted"* (Matthew 5:4).

In almost every auditorium of the Lord's church there are families that have been touched by miscarriages. Oftentimes these individuals remain silent, questioning their own actions or inactions. As Christians we need to work harder at consoling and comforting our fellow brothers and sisters who experience the unexpected loss of a child. There are no magic words that will make the situation better. But as Christians, we need to understand that this was a life in which God instilled a soul — and thus our comments and consolation should reflect that fact. Let us remind the bereaved parents that one day that individual will be in heaven happily awaiting the arrival of his or her faithful parents — *"I shall go to him,"* David stated at the death of his child (2 Samuel 12:23).

"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Corinthians 1:3,4). ✝

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The Lord's Church in Costa Rica



Costa Rica! Pura Vida!

Kevin Cauley

(Article compiled by Kevin Cauley with help from Moises Umaña Mora and Ray Bynum.)

The country of Costa Rica is located in Central America, south of Nicaragua and north of Panama, bordered on the west by the Pacific Ocean and on the east by the Atlantic. It lies south of the Tropic of Cancer, but north of the equator. Due to these factors, the country is largely a tropic rainforest environment, but it is also known for its active volcanoes and bio-diversity. Ecotourism is one of its leading industries. In size, the country is slightly smaller than the state of West Virginia.

Just over four million Costa Ricans live in the country, with more than half residing in the area known as the Central Valley, in which the capital

city of San Jose is located. Officially, the citizens of the country are known as Costa Ricans, but they like to refer to themselves as "Ticos".

Costa Rica is a democratic republic. Guaymi Indians inhabited the area when the Spaniards arrived in 1502. She became an independent nation in 1821. Following the civil war of 1948-49, peace has enabled the country to maintain free political institutions.

In 1965, the first church of Christ was started in Costa Rica in the Panamanian border town of Puerto Cortez. The congregation, however, did not last very long due to problems with immorality among the leadership. In the early part of 1966, a more concerted effort to teach the unadulterated gospel of Christ was made. Jerry Hill and Dan Coker, missionaries from Guatemala, followed up with some Bible correspondence students in Costa Rica while passing through to Panama. By the end of 1966, another congregation had been established in the town of Plaza Viquez near the capital city of San Jose. This group was composed of twelve members, with a man named Efraim Valverde preaching each week.

In February of 1967, two families answered the Macedonian Call to move to Costa Rica. Ray Bynum and Norman Fox were the first missionaries sent by the church in the United States to teach the gospel full time in Costa Rica. Supported by the Overland Park church of Christ in Overland Park, Kansas, these men worked many years following up on the Bible correspondence work that had been begun the year before their arrival. Brother Fox left the work in 1971 and brother Bynum was joined by Ron McClung in 1974. From 1967 to 1975, an average of over 1000 students per year studied God's word without the encumbrances of the doctrines and traditions of men.

In 1975, an effort was begun to bring together in larger congregations the small pockets of Christians meeting throughout the San Jose area. The congregation that had started with twelve members in Plaza Viquez, under the efforts of Efraim Valverde (and who moved to Venezuela in 1975), was then 30-40 members in size. Another congregation was started in 1976 in the town of Calle Blanco. This group was the result of a campaign that netted over forty baptisms. Congregations sprang up in Ipis and Cristo Rey as well. These churches became the base for the growth of the church throughout the country in the 80s and 90s.

In 1981, the Plaza Viquez congregation relocated and became the Hatillo church of Christ. This is now the largest congregation in the country, with somewhere between 175-200 members in attendance. In the



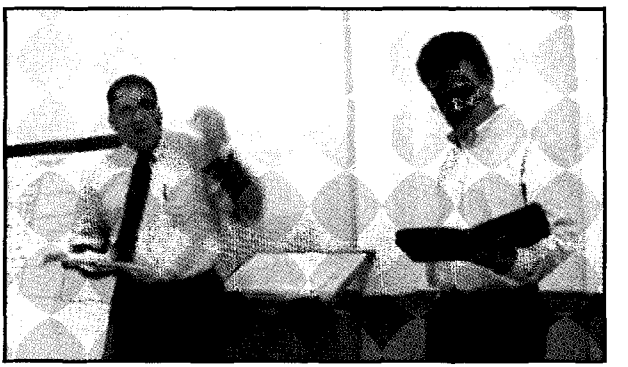
Members of the Hatillo Church of Christ.



Meeting place of the Hatillo Church of Christ.

1980's Bible correspondence courses continued to be employed to aid the growth of the church. The work became so profitable that a school of personal evangelism was started in 1985 under the leadership of Ray Bynum. This school had an eighteen-month program, was located in the Northern part of San Jose, and offered eighteen courses of study.

The school continued through 1990 when it merged with an effort to begin a formal preacher training program in San Jose. Both schools benefited from this merger, as prior to this time, the personal evangelism school did not have funds to support full-time study. The school was located at the Calle Blancos church of Christ and was supported by the Valdosta church of Christ in Valdosta, Georgia. Students found lodging in the homes of other Christians as they studied to become full-time evangelists. This school lasted until 1995 when, because of doctrinal problems regarding the issue of marriage, divorce, and remarriage, it was disbanded due to lack of support. To date, the closest school of preaching is in Panama and continues its relationship with the Valdosta church of Christ. The problems arising from false teaching on the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage were resolved and the majority of churches in Costa Rica today uphold sound doctrine on this issue.



Kevin Cauley preaching and Carlos Ulantes translating.

By the end of 1989, there were eighteen congregations in Costa Rica. Today, there are around 40 churches, with new congregations being started each year. Each month preachers from all of the congregations get together for a time of fellowship. Different brethren host the event, which starts on Friday evening and lasts through Saturday afternoon. Twenty to twenty-four preachers are being supported through American churches. The church at Tres Rios partially supports its own evangelist, and the church at Hatillo is self-supporting. There are currently no U.S. missionaries living full-time in Costa Rica. Only one church to date has purchased and constructed its



A youth devotional.

own building, in the town of Golfito. All other property in the country was purchased by churches in the United States.

Each year, the Valdosta, Georgia church of Christ holds an evangelistic campaign in the country. The church in Berryville, Arkansas has also been active in conducting annual campaigns. Bible correspondence work is still one of the major means of teaching the gospel in the country, with an average of about 800 new students per year. The church is also actively engaged in benevolence and prison work.

The Lord's Church in Costa Rica

D.H. Riley

In January of 1982, Sister Joyce Harris of Enola, Arkansas moved to Costa Rica as part of a team of missionaries, working in a sector of the capital city known as Hatillo and with a congregation by that same name. The Mars Hill congregation in Vilonia, Arkansas, where I attend, provided some financial support to Sister Harris and asked me to visit and encourage her since the other members of the mission team had moved on and she remained to continue her aspect of the work. The Lord blessed me with the

opportunity to visit Costa Rica first in March 1986.

It was on this trip that I met Sister Deomila Murill. I visited her home and heard her relate the story of her conversion in 1969; how she had written for a free Bible correspondence course that was being offered in her local newspaper through World Bible School. She was Catholic but really enjoyed studying the Bible and saw this as an opportunity. Through her studies, she came to know the truth. She realized that her family would not approve, but she informed her WBS instructor that she desired to obey the gospel. This instructor arranged for missionaries from Guatemala to travel to Costa Rica and teach her more. Following this additional teaching, and over the objections of her husband and children, she was baptized into Christ.



Salon and Deomila Murill

Her husband, Salon, was very upset with her decision, but she persuaded him to simply study the same course. He did, for the purpose proving her wrong. However, as he studied he had many questions concerning things taught and practiced by the Catholic Church. He decided to go to the priest and ask him about these things. The priest told him that he should not be studying for himself; it would only confuse him. He was told to go home and forget about those things. Instead, Salon went home and wrote to his instructor stating that he desired to obey the gospel also. The same missionaries were dispatched to Costa Rica again and he was immersed into Christ.

It was not easy for Brother Salon and his wife, Deomila. There was no congregation with which they could worship, so they met in their home for several years until a congregation of Christians was established. Their children were already adults and did not understand their parents' departure from the Catholic Church. For many months, they avoided their parents and they never became Christians themselves.

It was also on my first trip that I met the Sarmiento family: Roberto, Juanita, and children: Beatriz, Karen, Josue, and Barnaby, and Juanita's mother, Germina. This family had come to Costa Rica from El Salvador

about a year earlier. They had left their homeland due to the civil war there and personal threats made toward the family. They were living in a couple of small rooms built on back of the church building at Hatillo. Throughout the week I was there, I grew to love and appreciate brother Roberto and his wonderful family.



Roberto Sarmiento

On the Lord's Day, I traveled to a sugar cane plantation about twenty-five miles north of San Jose in Rincon de Salas de Gracia. A small congregation of Christians had begun meeting there in a shed built off the side of the house of one of the members. Approximately fifteen assembled for worship that day. Brother Roberto preached, and at the conclusion of that service three souls were baptized. One of those baptized was a young man named Teo who soon began preaching for the congregation at Rincon. The others were a husband and wife. The woman, sister Maria, and now her children, are still faithful members of the Rincon congregation today. Also in that assembly was a teenage girl named Virginia. Sister Virginia, her husband, brother Martin, her children, David and Jacob, and several other family members are still a vital part of this congregation today.

Traveling back to San Jose that evening, brother Roberto and I stopped in Alejuela, the second-largest city in Costa Rica, with a population of 150,000. As we ate together in a restaurant, brother Roberto began to talk about the need for congregations in Alejuela, in addition to the one small group that met near the center of the city. Plans began to develop. Little did we realize how those plans would change, and yet stay the same. Brother Roberto took me to the building of the existing congregation. The preacher, Brother Francisco lived in the house. We had a wonderful visit with him. He continues to serve as the preacher for this congregation today.

In December 1988, the little Rincon congregation asked brother Roberto to come and work with them on a permanent basis. Brother Teo



The meeting place of the Rincon Church of Christ.

began preaching for the Gracia congregation. He is still the preacher there and is supported by the Seventh and Mueller congregation in Paragould, Arkansas. So with the approval of the leadership of the Mars Hill congregation, brother Roberto moved to Alejuela and began preaching regularly for the Rincon church. Our discussion, in the planning stage, went something like this: "The Rincon area is in the rural part of the country. It may never be a large congregation, but it can be strong. And it can become a place where others are taught to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2). We wanted to keep alive the dream of establishing more congregations, especially in the major population areas of Costa Rica.

The Rincon church has grown both spiritually and numerically, and today it is one of the larger congregations in number. In 1989, construction was begun on a permanent building for the needs of the church, but in 1992 an earthquake seriously damaged that structure. With the help of the Norway brethren in West Virginia and the Centerville church in Arkansas, reconstruction began immediately and a two-story building now exists on the site of the original shelter. The house to which the first building was attached has also been purchased and is used for classrooms and will provide space for anticipated expansion. The congregation has produced several men who are utilized to teach and support other brethren who need teachers and preachers.

We maintained our dream of forming a new congregation in Alejeula. The Mars Hill brethren sent a group to knock doors and set up studies in the sector called Montecillos. These studies produced a few converts, and brother Alvaro Chavez came to preach for the new group in 1997. The church in Center Ridge, Arkansas began providing his financial support and the Southside congregation in Cabot, Arkansas provided rent for a place to worship. The Oakwood Road congregation in Fairmont, West Virginia got involved in this work in earnest at that time. These congregations purchased a lot in a prominent place and construction was begun on a building in 2003. That building is now complete. This congregation is referred to as Los Jardenes. A campaign was just conducted in which members of Center Ridge, Southside, and Oakwood Road congregations united their efforts with the members of Los Jardenes. More than 75 studies in the form of personal and correspondence courses were set up. The potential for growth for this congregation is tremendous since it is located in a major metropolitan area.

One of the aspects of cooperation between the Mars Hill congregation in Arkansas and the Rincon congregation in Costa Rica is unique, as far as we know. The Mars Hill church is involved in establishing congregations among the Hispanics who live in Arkansas. One year, the Sarmiento family comes to Arkansas to report to supporting congregations in Batesville, Velvet Ridge, Cabot, Center Ridge, Centerville, and Harding Street in Morrilton. They stay for one month and assist us with our work among the Hispanic congregations we establish. The next year, members of the Mars Hill congregation travel to Costa Rica for a week-long campaign that includes door-knocking in the mornings, Vacation Bible School in the afternoons, and a gospel meeting in the evenings. This arrangement has been extremely effective and edifying in both locations.

A young man, Steven Guerrero, who is a member of the Rincon congregation and a student at the Baxter Institute in Honduras, served as an intern with the Mars Hill congregation for six months this year. This brother will be returning to Costa Rica with a team of missionaries in January 2005 to work closely with the Rincon church to begin a new congregation in the central part of the capital city of San Jose. Again, the potential for growth for this work is tremendous.

The men are trained, the support structure is in place for many new congregations to be formed in a country that, at the present time, has only 43 congregations in the entire country. The most pressing need is for men who can dedicate themselves full-time to this work. Who will help? ✞

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Answers to Puzzles

Verse Search — 44 (from page 74)



Andrew

1. That he was a Jew, from Tarsus in Cilicia, and educated in Jerusalem by the well-known doctor of the law, Gamaliel.
2. Persecuted this Way; death; prison.
3. To bring to Jerusalem in chains the Christians he found in Damascus, for persecution.
4. They saw a great light from heaven, and Saul heard a voice,
5. "Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" That an attack on Christians is an attack on Christ Himself.
6. "I am Jesus of Nazareth."
7. No. He told him to go into Damascus, and someone would come to tell him what to do.
8. Ananias; prayed and fasted in penitence.
9. *"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord."*
10. Because of his past history of persecuting Christians.
11. He was standing by, consenting to his death, and guarding the clothes of those who were killing him.
12. *"Depart, for I will send you far from here to the Gentiles."*
13. They began to shout, "Away with such a fellow from the earth, for he is not fit to live!" They tore off their clothes and threw dust into the air.
14. The commander of the Roman troops.
15. He asked if it was lawful to scourge a Roman who was uncondemned.
16. He brought together the Jewish chief priests and the council, along with Paul, to have a hearing concerning their charges against Paul.

For further information, please contact:

Costa Rica





Government of Costa Rica Republic

Head of State and Government:
President Abel Pacheco

Secular Facts:

Location: Central America, south of Nicaragua and north of Panama, bordered on the west by the Pacific Ocean and on the east by the Atlantic.

Land Mass: 19,730 sq. miles, about the size of West Virginia. **Capital:** San Jose, 983,000.

Population: 4,173,000.

Language: Spanish and English.

Education: Compulsory, ages 5-15; literacy, 94%.

Religion: Roman Catholic, 76%; protestant, 14%.

Ethnic Groups: European and Mestizo, 94%; black, 3%; Amerindian, 1%.

Economy: Industries: food processing, textiles, clothing, construction materials, plastics; Chief Crops: coffee, pineapples, bananas, sugar, timber. Has a relatively high standard of living.

Life expectancy: 73.9, male; 79.1, female; Infant mortality, 10.6 per 1,000 live births.

Communications: TV sets, 229 per 1,000; Radios, 774 per 1,000; Telephone lines, 1,038,000; Newspaper, 94 per 1,000.

Monetary Units: Colon (CRC).

The Church:

Congregations: Approximately 40-45 churches.

History: The Ray Bynum and Norman Fox families moved to Costa Rica in 1967, supported by the Overland Park, Kansas Church of Christ. Ron McClung joined the work in 1974.

In 1975 an effort was begun to bring together some of the small pockets of Christians meeting throughout the San Jose area. The church was started in Calle Blanco through a campaign in which forty souls were baptized. The Plaza Viques congregation relocated in 1981 and was renamed as the Hatillo Church of Christ. Numbering 175 to 200 in attendance, this is the largest congregation in Costa Rica.

Very promising evangelistic work is being done through Bible Correspondence courses throughout the country.

Alternate years the Mars Hill church in Vilonia, AR brings the Sarmiento family to Arkansas to report on the work and to help with Spanish evangelism in Arkansas. The following year, Christians from Mars Hill go to Costa Rica to take part in evangelistic efforts there. This close cooperation has blessed both groups.

Front Cover: A view of Costa Rica's Central Valley.